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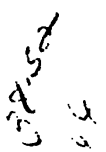

LEDDY MARGET

BY

L. B. WALFORD,
AUTHOR OF "MR. SMITH," "TROUBLESOME DAUGHTERS,"
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LEDDY MARGET.

CHAPTER I.

A GIRL OF EIGHTY.

It is of no consequence to anyone in what precise spot of her native land Lady Margaret lived.

She had found a sunny, sheltered nook on the western coast which exactly suited her, and there was she to be found, summer and winter alike, by all who chose to seek her out.

It was, to be sure, a few miles from anywhere —that is to say, from church, station, and market-place—but her ladyship had a stout little pony and basket-cart on two wheels, and this dot upon the road was to be met with at all hours, plying be-

tween the neighbouring town and the small domain among the sand-hills.

Lady Margaret had three maids, and they were all able to drive Tom—for such knowledge was essential. If they had never driven before, they learnt.

And every one of them liked it better than did their mistress, who voted the entertainment dull, except when now and then the fit took her to shop vehemently for an hour or two, and trot back to her nest laden with parcels and packages—mostly presents—after which unwonted outbreak she would resume with fresh zest the pursuits and occupations which, to the secret joy of the younger domestics, and the regret of the one disinterested elder, were more congenial to her nature. She was generally to be found on the shore, or in her garden.

"Is that her?" said Colonel Kelso to his daughter, pointing with his whip to a dark object which could just be perceived on the edge of the low tide.

A smart pair of cobs had brought father and daughter to the top of a rising ground, whence could

be obtained a view of Lady Margaret's snug cottage, with its miniature outbuildings, "See? Away out there? Is that her, think you?"

The sun was strong, and blazed down upon the shining sea-pools. Joanna blinked, and shook her head. "It is so far off, papa——"

"Nonsense, if I can see, you can see. There! It moves! Runs along! It's her for a wager! Shrimping, or periwinkle hunting, or something. Rare sport these low September tides must be for Lady Meg. Queer woman. Like nobody else in the world."

"Shall we go down and see what she is about?"

"Not as you value her friendship—at least Gibbie's friendship. Gibbie would never forgive you. No, no; we drive up properly to the door, send round the horses, say we'll wait in the drawing-room, and give Gibbie time to get in her mistress and rig her up for company. I know. I haven't been Lady Meg's neighbour all these years for nothing. You are but an ignorant schoolgirl."

"Not a schoolgirl now, papa."

"There's a deal to learn yet, Jenny."

The colonel paused, flicked his whip, and popped it into its niche as he gave both hands to guiding the cobs down the sharp incline which terminated at the cottage door. This reached, he relaxed the reins and resumed with a lowered tone and a jerk of his head in the direction of the porch: "There's someone in there—that's to say if she *is* in there—who could teach you more than all your books. There's a woman who knows how to live—and who'll know how to die too, when her time comes,—a woman——"

"But you yourself call her 'queer?"

"So she is queer. It is queer to find anyone——"

"'Sh, papa." For the door was being opened.

"Lady Margaret at home?" the colonel finished his sentence briskly. Then he had an opportunity of carrying out his programme, for, as anticipated, Lady Margaret was not at home, though Lady Margaret was within hail, and he was earnestly bidden to step within, and wait till her ladyship could be summoned.

"She's no that faur," said a voice in the rear, recognisable as that of Mrs. Gibson, the personal attendant, guide, counsellor, and friend—or, as some alleged, the ruler absolute of Lady Margaret St. Albans. "She's jist gane oot for a bit blaw—a stroll upo' the sands, Cornell. Her leddyship tak's the air aboot this time maist days. 'Deed, but she wad be vexed to miss ye. I'll sen' doun if ye'll kindly step ben," and the portly figure in its black silk dress swayed towards a side door. Gibbie was always ready for callers; three o'clock saw the well-worn but still eminently respectable black silk donned as regularly as clockwork, and "The girls wadna ken what to say" was her excuse for presenting herself as soon as the door-bell had been answered.

Neither would Gibbie's mistress herself have known what to say (according to Gibbie's ideas) had she been caught upon her doorstep; wherefore it was always satisfactory to cut in before her if possible. "My leddy is doun-bye, giein' directions to gairdner aboot her beddin'-oot plants," sounded decent at the outset—even if it had to be followed by Lady

Margaret's "I was helping Donald to pop in the geraniums," presently.

By no one was this better understood than by Mrs. Gibson's present interlocutor, who now scrambled down from the box seat, his eyes twinkling. "Her leddyship's takin' the air upo' the sands" meant that he had been right in his surmise as to the running object on the water's edge. Undoubtedly Lady Margaret was taking the air—and exercise too.

"All right; we'll wait," said he, promptly. "No hurry, you know. The horses will be the better of a good rest; so don't let your mistress be hurried in."

"Thank-ye, sir. Her leddyship will tak'—ahem—a meenute or twa to get up to the hoose; it's fresher doun by the water-side."

"Keeps well, does she, Mrs. Gibson?"

"Very weel indeed, sir. 'Deed, Miss Jenny, I'd hardly thocht it could be you, it's sae lang syne—and ye'll be back to bide noo, I'm thinkin'?"

Having despatched her messenger with instructions to bring Lady Margaret round by the back door, and on no account to let her be seen approaching from

the windows, Gibbie was now free for conversation; and the colonel being a favourite, and his only daughter just returned from a foreign school to take up her abode at home, the three were presently in full chat. "She canna wun in for awhile yet," reflected Gibbie, enjoying herself.

By-and-by she would retreat with a respectful "Ye'll excuse me; I'll jist see if my leddy is comin'," when about time for my lady to be nipped in the bud, ere she could enter wet and wild, as she was sure to be from the sea-wind and sea-water.

She would then be hustled upstairs and made as presentable as could be done in the time, and her line of opening address hinted at. "Ye'll say ye was takin' yer afternoon promenade, and had to be fetched in. So ye was. But oh, my leddy, dinna let on ye had a pail fu' o' beasts——"

Some people would have told this again. Some, with Lady Margaret's keen sense of humour, would have made merry over Gibbie's pathetic anxiety and instructions. Gibbie's mistress never did.

Let us now leave for a moment the drawing-room

with its occupants, and fly across the shore with the light-footed lass whose mission it was to summon the loiterer.

Nowhere could Katie perceive the object of her despatch, as she shot from the cottage path like an arrow from its bolt, straight ahead. This, however, did not trouble her; she had only to run on. But now she was all among the pools!—deep, troublesome pools some of them were!—and on every side were slippery rocks, covered with sea-weed, which, almost undistinguishable from the streaks of sand when viewed from a distance, assumed cruel proportions when actually barring further progress—where could Lady Margaret be?

There was nothing for it but to cry aloud; and, accordingly, a shrill note was uplifted, which took instant effect.

"Here; I'm here." To the girl's amazement, there rose from a weedy crevice only a few yards off the figure of which she was in search, and her mistress' voice somewhat hurriedly and vexedly replied as above. "Don't make such a noise, Katie. I'm here," repeated

Lady Margaret, with an odd mingling of reproach and apology in her tone.

"Oh, my lady, you're to come in, Mrs. Gibson says."

Stumbling across the intervening space, Katie was proceeding in hot haste—"There's Colonel Kelso, and Miss Kelso——" but Lady Margaret cut her short. "I saw them; I am coming. I was only just finishing here." She surveyed ruefully a net and pail by her side. She had been lying on her face scouring the limpid depths of the pool, and, truth to tell, had hoped to remain hidden, for though not generally averse to neighbourly intercourse, it was to-day an unwelcome interruption. "A tide like this!" she murmured regretfully—but she sighed and took up her pail.

"Let me help you, my lady." For it was an old, old woman who shouldered her net and walked straight through the water to Katie's side.

"Nothing of the sort; run in before me," said Lady Margaret, brandishing her net like a weapon to ward off interference. "Run in and say I am coming;" and she stumped along resignedly.

"Mrs. Gibson said you were to come round by the back door, my lady."

"Mrs. Gibson meant, that you were to leave it open for me," said my lady, with dignity. She knew how angry Gibbie would have been had she heard her orders literally repeated; it was only silly little Katie in her excitement who forgot to put them into proper shape. When Gibbie said "Mind she does it," Katie was meant to murmur reverentially, "Mrs. Gibson thought you would like to do it;" and Katie had to be checked, even while the speaker in rough coat, short petticoat, and battered hat, stumped through weed and water, and carried her own implements.

Katie, however, nothing daunted, pursued her own line, and her line was to affect that she could go no faster than she did, the while she kept a watchful, granddaughterly eye on Lady Margaret. In consequence,

"You're not as good as I on the shore, Katie," protested the latter, as together the two reached *terra firma* at length, and a great show was made by the handmaiden of achieving this with difficulty. "Now

you can carry these round, and I'll go up the short way——"

"The *back* way, my lady, is shorter, Mrs. Gibson thought——"

"Hoots!" But my lady, after a moment's hesitation, obeyed.

She expected to find Gibbie in her bedroom, and durst not rebel; she modified her tread as she passed the door within which Colonel Kelso and his daughter sat, and, in the common phrase, "cut like a lamplighter" up the little staircase directly it was past.

Gibbie, however, was still holding the visitors in parley, Lady Margaret having been found sooner than was expected, and in consequence the toilet which would certainly have been prescribed was now held to be superfluous.

"She won't see me till they're gone," chuckled the little old lady, and merely clapped a better hat over her sea-blown hair, instead of combing and smoothing it afresh.

Once upon a time, when the white hair was bushy and golden, its ruffled waves and flying ends had well

become the fair face round which they clustered, and Lady Margaret could never remember that such days were sixty years ago.

She did not pause to look in the glass—there was no time. On the bed lay a suitable afternoon dress with proper accessories—(for it must not be supposed that my heroine, whom we have thus caught at unawares, was always as here presented to our readers. It was her rule—as much as anything could be called her rule—to re-habille herself with a due regard to health and cleanliness directly she came in from prowls by land or sea)—but she glanced at the bed now with a negative eye.

One thing, and one only, she would do—she would slip the skirt of the dress over her wet petticoat, and wind a woollen shawl around her, instead of the mannish coat which Gibbie detested; and she had just accomplished this, when Gibbie's tap was heard at the door.

"Come in. Shall I do?" cried Lady Margaret hastily.

Now Gibbie had a great soul; she saw the case was hopeless at a glance.

"Oo, ye'll *do;*" she repressed a groan; then stepped forward and settled the hat which had tilted on one side. "Let me catch up your hair," continued she, seizing a hairpin. "They ken ye're frae the shore, and fowks canna be i' their bests upo' the shore. Ye'll say ye was enjoying the fine warm day, takin' the air whaur it was fresh, and that ye wadna bide to change for fear o' keepin' them langer—— Oo, she's aff!" as with a gay nod the apparition vanished. "'Deed the Cornell kens her for what she is, sae what for suld I mind *him?*" the good soul comforted herself; "an' 'deed if it's her leddyship's pleesure to gird hersel' wi' auld claes what is't to him or ony o' them?"

A pause. Then "Leddy Marget St. Albans can do as—her—leddyship—chooses," concluded Gibbie gloriously; and tossed her beamed frontlet (in the shape of a huge horned cap) to the sky; after which she proceeded to creep downstairs, and listen for a passing moment at the drawing-room door, to make sure all was well therein.

It was, and she crept away content.

"Dear Lady Margaret, I want you to admit this young daughter of mine to your friendship."

Colonel Kelso, with the air he only assumed on very great occasions, drew Joanna forward and placed her hand in the thin, wrinkled hand held out towards it. Joanna, shy and bold at once, as eighteen is apt to be, looked at the hand. Although it had been scooping in seawater, a hoop of brilliants encircled one of the fingers: brilliants which flashed in the sun as Lady Margaret moved. No one had ever seen the finger without the hoop; it guarded and almost hid from view the wedding ring.

"Dear me! what beautiful diamonds!" said Joanna to herself. "But of what use are fine rings to that poor old hand?"

She did not feel unkindly, but by-and-by, in the light of after events, she wondered how she had dared to think such a thought. There was not another ring in Lady Margaret's jewel box, and she had once possessed many.

"Indeed, I have been looking forward to Jenny's

coming home," said Lady Margaret in a voice so sweet and soft that Jenny smiled responsively. "May I call you by your name, my dear? Your grandfather and I were great friends."

("And *he* would have liked to be more than friends," commented Jenny's father, mentally, "and rejected though he was, he swore by Lady Meg to the day of his death.") "She will be only too proud," quoth he, aloud, leading the way for Jenny to follow. "I hoped you would adopt her into the old friendship—the third generation, you know,—and though none of your grandchildren are with you at present——"

"There are none of her standing, Charles. My daughters' girls are married women themselves—and my son Robert married so recently that his eldest is only nine. I wish I had some nice young grown-up granddaughters."

"You will soon have grown-up great-granddaughters."

"They will have to hurry then—or I shall be gone."

"Oh, not yet awhile, I hope, Lady Margaret. You are not—not——" Colonel Kelso, albeit a courtly gentleman, and fluent of tongue, stammered a little, at a loss for the proper phrase.

"I am eighty. It can't be very long now—not really *long*, you know." Then Lady Margaret turned to her younger visitor. "I often think what a wonderful thing it is—here am I, so well and strong, and hearty—never an ache or a pain to speak of—(Gibbie coddles me up sometimes)—I sleep like a top all night long, and wake so hungry for my breakfast; and down to the shore these glorious low tides the minute breakfast is over; I walk and I drive—(I have a pony-cart, my dear, but Tom is a terrible sluggard; if it weren't for the maids, who would be afraid of a livelier animal, I'd have an American trotter)—and I see my friends, rich and poor; they all come round me, and are good to me; no troubles, no cares, no worries have I, while waiting for the gate to open——"

"The—gate, Lady Margaret?" Joanna looked from one to the other. There was subdued seriousness in

her father's countenance, and she felt instantly a touch of awe. "The—gate?"

"The Gate of Life, dear child. I am within seeing distance of it now." Lady Margaret paused, and a smile of solemn radiance lit up her aged features. "It is a beautiful sight," she said.

CHAPTER II.

"A' FOR A PUIR DAFT MAN!"

"WHAT for did ye gang oot on a day like this?"

Gibbie, irate, was awaiting her mistress at the front door; Lady Margaret had been out in the rain; and now came in with a dripping umbrella, which could not be hidden, as it might have been had she reached her bedchamber before the meeting. The umbrella told its own tale; betraying that its owner had not been merely caught in a shower, but had faced the elements of *malice prepense.*

"Well, I wanted to go," said Lady Margaret, restively.

"I ken ye wanted to go; ye aye want to do what ye suldna. What ca' had ye to creep oot wi'oot a word to onybody, an' mysel' fast at the ironin' o' yer lace——"

"Yes, you were ironing; there was no need to disturb you."

"It was no *that.* Wha am I, that I'm no to be 'disturbed,' ironin' or no ironin'? Am I no yer ain maid? An' could ye no ring the bell? But ye kenned fine I wadna ha'e let ye gang——"

"So I did; and I meant to go."

There was a pause; Gibbie whipping off outer garments in angry silence. But presently she burst forth again.

"I ken whaur ye ha'e been. To daft Jock's at the Braeside. Twa gude miles frae here! An' ye come in drookit through! It's jist—— Me or ane o' the lasses could ha'e gane," scowling upon the thick-soled boot which, with tenderest touch, she was now drawing off. (On such occasions Gibbie's speech and actions were ever at variance.) "I kenned it," she now cried with savage exultation; "see to it: the stocking itsel'!——"holding up the same, damp and mud-stained, and dangling it in front of the delinquent, before proceeding to replace it by one well warmed

at the fire lit during her infuriated waiting. "Siccan a thing to do!" continued she, muttering fast.

Lady Margaret gave a little cough; it was time to make it up. "You see, Gibbie, Donald said Jock wanted to see me——" but she got no further.

"*You?* Wanted to see *you?* Set him up! 'Wanted to see me,' quo' she! Dinna we a' ken Jock aye wants the best o' everything? Me or ane o' the lasses could ha'e gane," relapsing into sullenness.

"Poor Jock is far through, Gibbie."

"Humph! No *that* faur, I'se warrant him."

"Oh, yes, he is indeed; the doctor thinks very badly of him, and he looks so weak and thin——"

"We could ha'e ta'en him a drap soup; or maybe wine——"

"That's right, Gibbie"—but Lady Margaret's joyful tone undid her, Gibbie relapsed on the instant. "I thought you would go," proceeded her mistress, unperceiving.

"Me go? Me? In sic weather? Na! If yer leddyship chooses to come in like a drooned rat——"

"But you said you or one of the maids would go."

"We wad *ha'e gaen*—to save you. It's different noo," drily.

Lady Margaret was silent.

"Ye'll catch yer deith." Gibbie made a sullen endeavour to resume the argument.

"What if I do?" said Lady Margaret, composedly.

Gibbie winced; she knew what that composure meant. There were times when her power failed, regions into which it could not penetrate—nay, when she herself was fain to hang her head, and feel rebuked. "What if I do?" repeated Lady Margaret with keen, bright eyes. "Eh?"

"A' for a puir daft man!"

"A poor daft man has as much right to have an emissary of Jesus Christ by his deathbed as the highest in the land," said Lady Margaret in ringing tones. "Fie on you—a follower of Him who cast out devils—to scorn poor Jock Gilroy for being thus afflicted! He may be set before you and me in heaven for aught we know. We, who have sinned so often and so deeply against light and knowledge, may well be put

to shame by yon poor fool. From his earliest years he has clung to that which is good, to that which is pure, to that which is *true.* He has groped through clouds and darkness, through ignorance and blindness, knowing little—less than many a babe—yet ever faithful to that he did know. Methinks I see the Saviour's smile of welcome for such a 'little one'!" She paused, but there was no reply.

"And now that the day is near the breaking," continued Lady Margaret with a kindling countenance, "would you forbid me to stand by while the clouds roll off and the day-star arises? The veil will lift soon—lift for us all; but to those just without there comes—there may come," she corrected herself, "a shrinking moment, when the very Cross itself is in shadow, and darkness falls upon the figure of the Son of God. This poor soul trembles in that shadow; and then think of it! the honour of it! he sent for *me*—unworthy me—to be my Master's mouthpiece! To comfort him with the promise of his Lord! . . . Would you have held me back from such an errand? Grudged me such a mission? Me, who may have

but few more such blessed moments ere my own call comes? . . .

"And it *was* blessed!"—her musing eye lit up anew. "Oh, to see the light come back; and peace, joy and love once more cast out fear! Soon, soon none will despise this poor weak one more; he will have exchanged his little hut upon the moor for a dwelling in that house where there are many mansions; for, Gibbie, Gibbie dear," Lady Margaret put out a hand that sued for peace, "in my Father's house are many mansions—many, *many* mansions." Her head fell upon her bosom, the last words died away in a whisper.

"Wad your leddyship please to move, while I wheel roond the chair?" said Gibbie very respectfully.

. . . . . .

Nobody could demean herself with more profound respect than Lady Margaret's faithful attendant when she pleased, and though it may not have hitherto so appeared, she reverenced her aged mistress from the bottom of her soul. To her there was but one person

in the world, as there was but one family—Lady Margaret's family.

Gibbie had been in it for generations, as it were. Her grandfather had been one Lord Derringer's butler, her father another's steward; and though to the ordinary mind Derringer Castle was only the home of a poor Scotch lord, it was the place of places in the eyes of those loyal retainers.

True, it was lonely and dull; for the only daughter of the house had been early wedded and borne across the border, and the only son was seldom seen within the paternal halls; but none the less was the outcry great and terrible when the latter died, and the ancient title became extinct, while the estates passed to a distant heir.

Gibbie was then a lass of twenty, and Lady Margaret sent for her to Alban Towers. . . .

Lady Margaret was in the plenitude of her prosperity and happiness, and it was a stirring household into which the raw Scottish lassie was imported, to be her ladyship's own girl, shaped and trained at the hands of her ladyship's own maid.

Gibbie, or Marion as she was termed at this period, served her apprenticeship with the usual ups and downs; but at its close she had struck her roots into the soil; she had been ten years in the family when the catastrophe overtook it of which more anon, subsequent to which she ascended in the scale and took rank as "Mrs. Gibson".

Even then, however, she was not Lady Margaret's "Gibbie".

For a long, long time did the two live side by side ere the day, almost equally sad to both, arrived, when the stately English home was left behind, and mistress and maid, the former seventy, the latter fifty years of age, entered together upon a new phase of existence at the little cottage among the sandhills.

Thus much explained, Gibbie may perhaps be pardoned for having even at that epoch begun to wield the sceptre which, as we know, she now held with so firm a hand.

To return. It was an hour or two after the interview above narrated, and Lady Margaret, comfortably ensconced beside a bright fire and shaded lamp,

beheld a stout figure, clad in outdoor habiliments, enter the room. She understood in a moment.

"Oh, you good Gibbie!" cried she. "And in the dark too! I hope you took Mysie or Katie with you? You took Mysie? That was right. Well? Well, and how was he?"

"He was—ye were no that faur wrang, my leddy. He was—ahem!"

"Dead, Gibbie?" Lady Margaret leaned forward quickly.

Gibbie nodded. "Jist deid. Deid 'ore ye'd gaen a hunner yairds frae the door! Ye'd scarce set fit ootside, when 'Losh!' says he, 'ca' Leddy Marget back!'—but they didna like——"

"Not like. Oh, Gibbie! Not like!"

"They askit him what he wanted, and 'twas jist to haud the han' o' ye, for he was 'gaun,' he said, an' ye'd promised to haud his han' as he went; sae they tell't him ye was ower faur ayont the brae, to pacify him; then, says he, 'Tell her frae me that when her ain time comes she can cry on Jock, and he'll come to her—though maybe she'll no see it's him till

she's ower the border. But he'll come, ye tell her.' The puir cratur—he kenned nae better. 'But,' says his mither, 'Jock, what sort o' a message is thon to sen' to a leddy like Leddy Marget, whae's like to ha'e her ain kith an' kin in plenty, forbye them that's sairved her near half a lifetime?' 'She comed to me,' says he. He couldna understan' the differ, ye ken."

"Nor can I," said Lady Margaret, softly.

"Then he jist cries oot, 'Lord Jesus, I'm comin'! Daft Jock's upo' the road; I was sair frichtit, but Leddy Marget says——' an' wi' that he's awa'! Yer leddyship's name the last upo' his lips! Wow! but he lookit rael bonnie, wi' a maist extraordinar *sensible* look! She has him a' daikert oot. I'd ta'en a sheet wi' me; for Donald said fowks thocht he wad flit the nicht, and she was rael pleased, puir body. She was thinkin' maybe yer leddyship wad look in i' the bye-gaun?"

"I'll go to-morrow, of course, Gibbie." Gibbie withdrew.

"There now! it *was* good of Gibbie to go!" said

Lady Margaret to herself, lying back in her arm-chair, contentedly. (Lady Margaret never thought it was "good of herself to do anything.") "What a blessing it is to have such a faithful creature to scold and love me, and help me with the people about. I am always forgetting; my memory is so silly, never had a good memory except for things that are of no use to anybody"—and there came a sudden little catch in the speaker's breath, for the things that were of no use to anybody stood out in bold print, stamped with indelible ink upon Memory's page.

There were days when Lady Margaret could see herself a childish figure in child's clothes, frisking among sunny flower-borders, swinging, shouting, tossing the ball from hand to hand, the inventor of games innumerable and frolics indescribable.

There were days when it was a demure maiden, with sparkling eyes and blushing cheeks, who danced across the stage.

Anon the maiden has a lover—blissful, heavenly period! He comes thundering at the gate, fiery with

impatience, scornful of opposition. He woos and wins —who could resist Victor?

And ere the wedding day arrives, he places on her finger that liquid belt whose radiance many beside Colonel Kelso's young daughter have admired. He says it is to remain there till death—and there it remains. She never goes to bed at night without kissing it.

Glowing pictures too are those which follow of the young wedded life, crowned with every blessing. The gallant bridegroom is gently transformed into the fond and tender husband, the bride into a loved companion and glad-hearted, proud young mother. There are scenes of pain and sorrow, it is true; nights of weeping no less clearly visible than morns of joy—nay, still more precious; but weal or woe, grief or gladness seem, in the retrospect, to have been alike blest, are alike dear and sacred now.

There is only one scene upon which Lady Margaret fears to gaze too often. Gibbie does not like to see her eyes red; and though they are very good eyes, and it is only when she takes up a book or writes a

note that glasses are resorted to, still they are tel tales. Gibbie *always* knows when her old mistres who has fits of musing now and then—(on a summe evening when the sun is setting red over the sea, c in some still, silent, wistful autumn hour between th lights)—Gibbie knows by instinct if Lady Margar has been thinking of her husband's last "Gooc bye."

Gibbie herself remembers it with a full heart.

She had chanced to be summoned to the doo step, and was standing near her lady, then, for all he lusty sons and daughters, as blithe and comely madam as any in the land, when Sir Victor, broa and grey, but a noble gentleman withal, ran up th steps a second time to take a second kiss, seeing tha he came not back that night, being about to ride t the far end of the county on business, and the day too short and dark for the return journey.

Gibbie had been half-contemptuous of so muc middle-aged affection. "Like as if they were joes! she had cried to herself; but she hears now, an knows that Lady Margaret hears, the clattering hoo

ring gaily out, and then die away in the distance, never to be heard from that horse and rider again.

Ah, well! it happened thirty years ago, what followed.

They brought him home; they buried the poor steed where he lay (at the foot of a hidden precipice to which he had bolted in the mist); and Lady Margaret—no one ever knew how Lady Margaret bore it.

Looking back after awhile, people seemed to remember that she was seen little of for a long time, and that when she did begin to figure again upon the stage of life, she was altered.

In youth she was "a merry grig," her old nurse said. She was always a cheerful, light-hearted woman, with abundant interests and occupations. Religious too. Sir Victor and Lady Margaret St. Albans had trod the paths of righteousness hand in hand; theirs was a God-fearing household, and their children were brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; so that, the period of mourning expired, those who understood human nature were not surprised to hear the widow laugh again.

And they expected to see Lady Margaret go (living in the old house, and gradually resume tl even tenor of her life—which she did for a time; b those who lived in daily contact with her knew wh they knew.

Thirty years ago! Lady Margaret can refer to now, to all except *the* day (of that she nev speaks), with perfect serenity. She had her de chidren, her Victor and Robert and Louis, her Magg and Isabel. All now are either married or dead. Sl made a home for them while they needed it; f twenty years the stately mansion where now Sir Robe reigns (sole survivor of the brothers) knew her as mistress; from it went forth weddings and funeral and within its walls were gathered from time to tin merry parties ever on the increase. There were troo of little ones who called her "Granny."

Life was not what it had been; but it had st its jocund moments—its pleasures, hopes, doubts, fea disappointments, triumphs. The cup which had on brimmed over was still full.

Gradually it sank a little. Time with his stea

tick went on, picking and stealing as he went. Partings grew to be more frequent than meetings. Every once in awhile the family vault would be opened. The little ones were no longer little; their fathers and mothers were grey-headed.

And at last came a wrench, long foreseen, but bad to bear none the less. Lady Margaret, at seventy years of age, must quit the beauteous home to which the girl of twenty had been borne as a bride, and make way for the bride of another generation.

Not that of her first-born, first and dearest of all. Victor had, unwedded, followed his father to the tomb, knowing no woman's love but that of his mother to the last; it was the wanderer, Robert, who had returned from a far country, bringing with him a new mistress for Alban Towers.

It was quite right, Lady Margaret said. She rejoiced that the family seat should be once more the residence of the head of the family. It was high time for Sir Robert to settle down; she had really almost despaired of his doing so, but "better late than never."

She drove all over the county announcing the news and receiving congratulations.

But Gibbie found her the same night standing in front of a picture in the old gallery; and Gibbie saw that her hands were clasped, and that a handkerchief which dropped from between them was picked up and hastily hidden from view, as Lady Margaret with head averted moved away.

Gibbie had spoken to her, but received no answer.

CHAPTER III.

A PILGRIM.

A FEW more words of retrospect.

We left Lady Margaret on the eve of quitting her wedded home, and returning to end her days in the land of her birth.

She made, as we have said, no moan about it; indeed she took much cheerful interest in the small domain which had been found for her by an old family friend (none other than the Colonel Kelso already presented to our readers), and presided over the removal of her pots and pans, as she called them, with immense zeal and activity. Those, however, who predicted that many waggons would be required for the furniture of the retreating dowager, would have been strangely surprised had they known what Gibbie knew. Gibbie going round and round —and even in those days authoritative, though no-

thing to what she afterwards became—could scarce repress before others, and made no effort to do so in private, the indignation with which her bosom burned. All that was best and rarest—all the bureaux, work-tables, cabinets, which were the accumulation of years at Alban Towers—belonged to Lady Margaret. Nothing but solid, massive pieces of furniture had been there when she came.

And now she would have none of them—none at least to speak of.

"Ye'll no leave this?" Now and again an effort must be made, let Lady Margaret be as "thrawn" as she would. "Gudesakes, my leddy, ye'll no leave yer ain braw inlaid writin'-table; an' the brocade screen; an' the——"

"Silly woman; what good would a fine brocade screen, fit only for a place like this, be to me in my little cottage among the sandhills?"

Gibbie, doggedly: "Ye bit to plenish the cottage."

It went to the faithful creature's heart to see the china and the silver and the dainty pieces of rare

old embroidery put back in the places whence she in her zeal had extracted them. She did indeed contrive to nick a few odds and ends unseen (a musical box, a gold chatelaine with appendages, and an ivory cabinet filled with mother-o'-pearl counters, together with various minor trifles which could be whipt under her apron in passing), but she was driven to such nefarious acts by Lady Margaret's improvidence. Lady Margaret could not see that she wanted anything at all—according to Gibbie.

At length the latter hit upon a talisman which worked. "I think, my leddy—ye'll excuse my sayin' it—but Sir Victor wad no ha'e likit you to leave yon," she would say, smoothly; "Sir Victor was aye fond o' yon." And "yon" was allowed to be packed without a word.

Of the other articles, the contraband cargo smuggled by Gibbie *via* her apron and other devious ways, it suffices here to say that before she had done with them they grew to be a burden; for though she kept them hidden in a garret for months, and only suffered them to glide into notice one by one (insert-

ing them at intervals among the downstairs furniture), Lady Margaret would be so disturbed by each appearance, and so uneasy wondering what Gibbie had taken next, that it was a positive relief when the worst was out. This proved to be the ivory cabinet; and she could not allege it to have been a partiality of Sir Victor's, for it had been sent home from China quite recently by the very son who was now returned to oust his mother.

Gibbie had greatly admired the cabinet. "Wad he ha'e likit to fin' it there?" she now ventured as a last resource; but Lady Margaret only looked what she very seldom did, annoyed. Robert was not like his father and brothers; he would have been very well pleased to find anything beautiful and valuable left at the Towers. He would not have heeded sentiment.

The disclosure took place too late, however, for anything to be done in the matter—for which Gibbie secretly thanked her stars—and thereafter she had at least the satisfaction of keeping the pretty toy pure and polished, and setting it out to the best advantage in the little drawing-room of the cottage.

She had also a sympathiser, had she known it, in Miss Joanna Kelso. "The only thing I was disappointed in, papa, was the house," said Joanna, on talking over her first visit.

"The house? What was the matter with the house?" replied he. "A good enough, pretty enough, cosy enough little housie. Small, of course — but still, what ailed you at it? What fault had you to find with it?"

"I did not mind the smallness; it was not that. But I had expected to find a perfect little gem — everything most exquisite on a tiny scale."

"Who gave you leave to expect anything of the kind?"

"Why, you—you yourself. You always said it was something worth going to see."

"Stop a bit, my lassie. I said it was something to see Lady Margaret—not her nutshell."

"Oh!"

"But," resumed Miss Joanna, after a moment's pause, "although of course Lady Margaret is delightful, and I did not mind her own very peculiar gear

—it was peculiar, papa, but it did not seem to affect Lady Margaret in the least—I do wish her surroundings were a *little* more—that they were not *quite* so bare and plain."

"Bare and plain? I don't know a pleasanter little drawing-room anywhere than that at the cottage. You sit in that little sunny window looking out over the sea—while within there are books, flowers, a picture or two—what more would you have?"

"Some old ladies have such wonderful things; relics and heirlooms; tons of old china, and foreign curiosities. I was hoping for a grand rout among Lady Margaret's treasures."

The colonel was silent, looking a little oddly. He was a reticent man on certain subjects.

"What there *was* was all in perfect taste, certainly," pursued Joanna, "but there were so very few things about. No knick-knacks; no little ladylike trifles."

Then her father made what was for him an effort. "Harkee, my little girl; I once said the same to Lady Margaret herself. In old times I paid a visit to the

Towers while Sir Victor was still alive, and a finer place I never stayed at. *It* would have pleased you; you might have rummaged there to your heart's content. So, when I persuaded my old friend to pitch her tent down here, showed her the cottage, and saw her fairly inducted into it, I felt, like you, surprised that it was not filled to overflowing with the paraphernalia of a great lady. I knew it *could* have been so; and my only doubt in recommending so small a house was whether it would hold all the furniture that Lady Margaret would consider necessary. When I went and saw for myself how things were, I suggested that she had under-estimated its proportions, and had brought next to nothing. What do you think she said to that?"

"What, papa?"

"She replied in a couple of lines I made her repeat twice that I might get them by heart:—

> Pilgrims who travel in the narrow way,
> Should go as little cumbered as they may.

That was her answer; do you understand it?"

"I—I suppose so. But, papa, was not Lady Mar-

garet a 'pilgrim' when she lived in state at Alban Towers? Why did she 'cumber' herself then?" and the speaker smiled with something of saucy triumph, for Jenny felt that she had made a point.

"My own words—at least my own retort, Miss Wiseacre. I am afraid it slipped out, not over delicately, before I knew what I was saying: but it gave no offence; Lady Margaret knew I had no intention to offend; and she shut me up a second time as good-humouredly though quite as completely as before. 'When you have a long journey before you,' said she, 'it is very right to provide comforts and amusements' ('little amenities,' I believe were her words) 'to ease the way. I take no shame to myself for having been a zealous collector in my day,' said Lady Meg—(we all know she was, and had several most valuable collections). She then went on to say how she had taken pains to get together all sorts of curious and beautiful objects of art or whatever you call them; how fond she had been of arranging and cataloguing them; and what a zest such pursuits lent to her rather quiet life.

"She never was a great woman for society, I must tell you," proceeded the colonel, pulling his moustache thoughtfully, "never cared much for the usual fuss of gay folks—although the Towers was a hospitable house enough, and the pleasantest place in the world to stop at. But when I took courage at this to observe that it was my recollection of her charming rooms there which made her *pilgrimage* suggestion not quite comprehensible (of course one must say such things civilly, Jenny, else they sound rude; but I flatter myself I have some tact), Lady Margaret gave me one of her smiles—you noticed her smile? no woman ever had a sweeter, I think—and put her hand upon my arm, saying (I can hear her now), 'Charles, who wants the rattletraps that have beguiled the tedium of the way when the journey is nearly over? Does not every traveller give away to those who are still glad of them, the newspaper, the hot-water bottle, the reading-lamp, the remains of fruit and flowers—all that were grateful and cheering for the passing hour, but for which no further use can now be found?' It was when she had said this, Jenny, that she presented

me with that handsome silver flask I always carry on the moor. She had brought it with her, having been Sir Victor's—found upon him, I believe, on the fatal day; and the dear old woman assured me that the pleasure of knowing I used it and valued it for his sake was a thousand times greater than any she could derive from seeing it in her own cupboard."

"She does like *us* to have nice things to be fond of, then?" cried Jenny relieved. "I was afraid you were going to say that Lady Margaret looked upon our gathering together of pretty things as—that she would think I was a sort of 'Man with the muck-rake'—you know, papa, Bunyan's man—because I do like poking about, unearthing 'finds,' and saving up my money till I can buy them."

"So that is how your money goes, extravagant girl? Well, I think you may safely tell Lady Meg about it. She has the keenest sympathy in everything of the kind. Oh no, I don't fancy she would think you a bit of a *muck-rake* man, for I heard her dilate on that very subject once; Sir Victor was laughing at her, and she replied—pretty warmly, too, for

Meg could speak up when she chose—that the 'sticks and straws' old Bunyan referred to were the worthless scum of worldly successes we hanker after so greedily, and snatch at so voraciously, whenever we get the chance—successes which, according to her, hindered instead of helping us on a Christian course,—kept our eyes fastened downward instead of setting them free to look above. I don't fancy your innocent little treasure-gathering would ever stand between you and heaven, eh, Jenny? You tell Lady Margaret about it."

One fine bright afternoon shortly after this, the basket-cart on its two wheels was seen approaching, and its occupant proved to be the old lady herself, dressed in what Gibbie called her "bests," with the little handmaiden Katie seated by her side. There was no back seat.

"And Gibbie would make me bring her," confided Lady Margaret, accepting the colonel's arm to go within, for although she never understood why she should be cramped after driving, she had to own that just at first there was usually a little stiffness of the joints to be worked off. "Charles, you know Gibbie.

She would fret the whole time I was away if I had not someone with me. So because *she* is frightened *I* have to saddle myself with a hen-flunkey—that's what I call Katie—and appear too grand to go about alone."

"It is always useful to have a second person with you when driving, Lady Margaret. One can never tell what may happen. Your pony might cast a shoe."

"Well, I could drive to the smithy."

"No doubt, no doubt; but there are other things. I do not let Jenny drive without a stable-boy. She objects to a groom; so do I; it would be disagreeable for her along these lonely roads; but we have a lad of fifteen who is told off for the job. And if any of the maidservants were as clever in such matters as your Katie, I should prefer to send a 'hen-flunkey,' I assure you."

"Oh, Katie is very clever," said Lady Margaret, and felt soothed. She had rather disliked driving up to Lochmadden House under the implied supervision of the little whipper-snapper Katie. As if she had not

driven ponies—and horses too—before Katie was ever born or thought of!

And though Lady Margaret never wished to be younger—would not for all the world have seen the Gate whereof she spoke to Joanna Kelso recede a single pace—she did not like nor understand the idea that she was feeble in strength because ancient of days.

She was ready to die; glad and willing to die; ever listening for the call with a watchful, prepared ear,—but it was too bad of Gibbie to think she could not manage Tom by herself.

Gibbie, too, was simply ridiculous about other things. Keeking and spying if her mistress did but stay out in the gloaming half an hour beyond her usual time; making a fuss if she tripped over a loose stone; always worrying about weather and catching cold. "I never catch cold," quoth Lady Margaret, proudly.

"She was very tiresome the other day about something," proceeded she, putting her hand to her brow with an effort to remember what had called

forth the tiresomeness. "Oh, I know; she would not let my new evening dress be cut low at the neck. Now, you know, Charles, that I never mind *how* I go about in the day-time"—(he bowed, he knew—well)—"but I do feel I ought to be suitably dressed for the evening. And Sir Victor always liked me to wear a low-necked dress. Gibbie knows that—knows why I am so particular—but she made so much ado (and that before Miss Macalister, my little dressmaker) that I felt quite ashamed. Of course, I had to give in."

"Old servants are dreadful nuisances, Lady Margaret."

Lady Margaret looked up quickly, while a gleam of intelligence responded to his mischievous tone. "Not to be caught," said she, shaking her head. "Too bad of you, Charles, and before Jenny, too! Jenny, my love, whenever I come here to fire off a tirade against the dearest, faithfullest soul that ever breathed, your father makes a face like that. Look at him now, and you will know the face again."

"But what was the end of the low-necked dress?"

said Colonel Kelso, who revelled in these disclosures. "Are you to have it?"

"My dear Charles! I never said I wanted to wear a low-necked dress, *now!*" Lady Margaret looked properly shocked. "I have not worn one—not a real one—for I can't tell how many years. The last time was when I presented Isabel; and *she* presented *her* daughter half a dozen years ago; came home from India on purpose. The silly little chit was only seventeen, and got engaged on the voyage back; engaged to a man she had scarcely seen a fortnight, and of whom she knew nothing except that he made a fuss about her pretty face. He was more than old enough to be her father too: rich, and loaded her with presents. I have no patience with such matches. She didn't care a button for the man; it was only to be married and fly about the world—there now, what an old scandal-monger I am!" suddenly breaking off at what Miss Jenny Kelso considered the most interesting point of her discourse.

"Oh, do go on, Lady Margaret," said she, all ears.

Lady Margaret looked at her. "No, no, my dear, better not; it only leads one to be ill-natured. What were we talking about before this?"

"Gibbie and the low-necked frock," persevered the colonel, not to be put off.

Quick as lightning, Lady Margaret turned upon him. "You've got it to 'frock' now, have you? And it will be all over the county next, that Lady Margaret St. Albans, eighty years of age, frolics like a bairn in a low-necked frock, with, maybe, a blue sash-ribbon."

The Kelsos, father and daughter, laughed.

"Do be merciful to a poor benighted male creature, and condescend to enlighten his ignorance!" cried the former. "What in the name of puzzlement *did* Gibbie object to?"

"You may well say that. 'Tis the first word of sense you have spoken to-day, Charles. What *did* she object to? Yes, indeed. A few inches cut down in front! What dressmakers call a 'V'-shaped neck. Absolutely different from a really 'low' one. And I

had such pretty lace to edge it with!" There was real regret in her tone.

"And that was all?"

"All."

"And where was the harm of it?"

Lady Margaret shrugged her shoulders.

"'Pon my word, she might have let you have your own way for once. Gibbie is arbitrary enough, in all conscience; but what it should signify to any human being how you dressed for your own dinner-table, where not a soul sees you ——"

"I am always in the habit of dressing for dinner whether anyone sees me or not." Lady Margaret missed his point, but she closed the discussion with dignity.

It was now the colonel's turn. "This little girl of mine has heard that you used to be a great collector, Lady Margaret; and she has started in a humble way."

"Indeed?" Lady Margaret was on the alert in the instant. "Very glad to hear it, my dear. What is it, stamps, shells, butterflies?"

"N—no; not exactly; that is, I have been collecting, but I have only got a very few." Jenny, shy and humble, deprecated contempt. "What I do like are rare old prints," she owned, blushing. "I do like them so very much. And I like nice editions of the books I am fond of. But of course I have hardly got *any* yet ——"

"You are at the beginning, my child; but what a delightful beginning! I had a number of fine books once, in rare and beautiful bindings, and many a happy hour they gave me. I am afraid I have given them all, or nearly all, away; but—well, well, we shall see: there may be one or two left," nodding intelligently. "Cultivate such tastes, Jenny; they enrich the mind; they make it gloriously independent; they keep its edges keen and bright." ("Stave off all kinds of demons, too, Charles;" aside to him.)

"But, Lady Margaret"—Jenny, emboldened, pressed nearer—"was it not a pity—just rather a pity—to scatter your collections again? I mean when you had had all the trouble—though of course it isn't a trouble—but still, I should feel *dreadfully* if I

knew a time would come when I should not care for my gallery or my book-case."

Lady Margaret mused a moment. There was a great deal she could have said, and said well, on the subject; but her eye fell upon the bright, eager face, and in a flash she saw herself at Jenny's age. She rose and laid her hand on the young girl's arm. "Frisk away, little lambkin," she said. "Don't worry to understand the old sheep's 'Baa'. If you live to my age, you will know all about it. You don't care for dolls now, Jenny?" she demanded as with an afterthought.

Jenny laughed. "No, indeed, Lady Margaret."

"Yet when you were a bit of a thing, as you seem now to me, your greatest idea of the privileges of being grown-up was that you would have unlimited dolls, and unlimited time to play with them. Most earthly things have become to me like those dolls, Jenny. I give them, as an elder sister on the verge of womanhood gives away her childhood's treasures, to the younger ones."

"You will soon have nothing left to give, how-

ever," said Colonel Kelso with gentle raillery what Gibbie says is true."

"Ah, poor Gibbie, I am a sad thriftless creatu her eyes." Lady Margaret responded to the li tone in an instant. "I believe she continually c over my small possessions in a sort of terror of vanishing. I have a few locked drawers—for must keep *some* little things for presents; but I al feel a sort of traitor when I go to peep among t And Gibbie really was very naughty to me about dress, Charles," suddenly reverting to her griev "although she is, and you know it, the best dearest of women, she ought not to have allowe own silly prejudices to make her forget her plac

The speaker paused, then murmured to he unmindful or oblivious of the presence of ot Jenny turned away, but Colonel Kelso, regardin aged friend with a softened eye and reverential caught the low whisper, "Of course; for Victor it". Then he too turned his head aside.

CHAPTER IV.

"WHAE'S AFTER LEDDY MARGET'S AIPPLES?"

"I AM going to give a tea-party," said Lady Margaret.

"Whae's comin'!" demanded Gibbie. After which she cocked her head upon one side, and waited for the answer.

For a good deal depended upon who were coming: and though the old servant shared her mistress' hospitable Scottish instincts, she had charge of the catering, and regulated it according to her own notions. Lady Margaret would have fed all alike, putting the best she had to give upon her board—but Gibbie knew better. Scones and cookies might do for some, supplemented by strawberry and gooseberry jam of her own manufacture,—but there were guests for whom it behoved her to provide delicacies and elegancies such as had graced the table in Alban

Towers, and these necessitated procuring "loaf-bread" from the town, with other accessories. It should never be said that Lady Margaret St. Albans, although now living in retirement and content with rusticity, could only entertain with the common plenty of a farmer's wife.

"Well, it's to be a girls' tea-party; and the girls are the Misses Anstruther, Miss Nancy Muir, and Miss Joanna Kelso," said Lady Margaret, cheerfully, conscious of a list above reproach. Occasionally Gibbie had almost to wring her mistress' neck before she could get the names out of her.

Now, however, Gibbie smiled, well pleased.

"'Twill be Miss Jenny's pairty then," said she graciously. "Am thinkin' she's no been here her lane before. Ye'll want baith tea and coffee," she paused.

"Everything you can give us, Gibbie. They are all young and hungry, you know. Don't be too fine, Gibbie. 'Tis not as if it were their fathers and mothers."

"Am thinkin' sae. Still we maun ha'e loaf-bread, an' a wheen sweet things frae Sandy Maccallum."

"They love scones, and oatcakes, and jam. And, Gibbie, meringues, some of your own meringues, that no one makes like you."

"If I be to mak' meringues I maun ha'e cream to put i' them. And though they may fancy scones and sic like, they're no to gang awa' and say" (mimicking) "'We'd naethin' but scones!' to them that asks. There maun be rolled bread-and-butter upo' the table, a'though naebody wants it—an' fancy biscuits, an' aimond cake."

"Very true, Gibbie. We must do everything decently and in order; so let there be some dishes for show and some for use; and, harkee, Gibbie," a sudden thought striking her, "if Sandy Maccallum has got a nice hunch of wedding-cake—he sometimes bakes a bit over—bring it back with you too."

"I bit to gang mysel' then?" But the tone was not inimical. "What day's the pairty? The morn?" A pause. "'Deed, I'd best gang mysel'," concluded Gibbie, casting an eye outside and perceiving that the day was fine. "I was thinkin' o' Mysie; but whiles Sandy hasna jist the thing ye seek, and then

you maun tak' what he *has*—aweel, I'd best be stirrin' then." And she bustled off to make preparations.

These mainly consisted of liberal charges to the younger maids to keep an eye upon their mistress, while careful not to intrude such supervision upon her ladyship's consciousness; and having won a sort of promise from the latter to confine herself for the time being to the immediate precincts of the small domain, the faithful soul put on her Sunday bonnet, encased her person in a warm shawl, and hung a well-worn reticule upon her arm.

She also put on a pair of black kid gloves; for on this occasion she was not to handle the reins; Lady Margaret had taken upon herself to desire Donald to attend Mrs. Gibson on her expedition.

The order had come to Gibbie's ken whilst making ready in her own attic bedroom; and though her cap was off, she had almost come down to argue the point.

But on second thoughts, the road was lonely, and she herself not so young as she had once been; where-

fore, although for form's sake a slight demur must be made on having the fact duly communicated, she graciously gave in, almost before Lady Margaret had conceived such a thing possible; thus demonstrating (and hoping that Mysie and Katie would see and take to heart) what a good obedient servant she was whenever a command was reasonable, and laid upon her in a proper manner.

Donald also being all complaisance, the two started upon their jaunt—and Lady Margaret looked after them with a wicked eye. Lady Margaret could be very wicked when she chose.

She had now a daring scheme in view; but no one would ever have suspected that Gibbie and Donald had been got out of the way in order to leave the coast clear for it.

No sooner, however, had the sharp ring of Shetland Tom's hoofs died away upon the hill road, than his mistress turned airily round to little smiling Katie beside her at the door. "I shall only be in the garden, Katie, should anybody call. You will easily find me if I am wanted."

"Yes, my lady," said Katie, dutifully.

"But, Katie"—a pause, Lady Margaret adjusting her shawl—"do not disturb me unless there is any real *occasion*, you understand. I do not care for people running after me at all hours of the day. And I am only in the garden;" then hastily shifting to another line of defence: "*I* am in the garden, Katie; you and Mysie must take care of the house."

"Yes, my lady," said Katie as before. She was a smart little puss, and careful about her pronunciation. Neither she nor Mysie would have demeaned themselves to say "leddy," nor use the broad idioms Mrs. Gibson did, for the world.

Occasionally the pair were a trifle resentful of Gibbie's rigorous rule, and her determination never to be ignorant of Lady Margaret's whereabouts. It was overdone, they thought; and when her ladyship now and then turned restive, as we know she did, in their hearts they sided with her, so long as acts of rebellion did not involve matters of etiquette, or attire, or anything really serious.

To inveigle a sea-stained scarecrow in by the back-door when visitors were in the front room, was one

thing; to worry a peaceable old lady who was quietly amusing herself out of harm's way when no strangers were about, was another.

So, although Gibbie had told them to "mind an' tak' a keek" at their mistress every now and then, the faithless hussies in their superior wisdom did nothing of the kind.

Instead, they revelled in their own affairs, after seeing Lady Margaret stroll unconcernedly out of sight; and as they were ready with voluble assurances on the return of the driving-party, and as by that time her ladyship was resting, as Gibbie would fain have had her rest oftener, on the little couch before the drawing-room fire, Mrs. Gibson was neither then nor thereafter enlightened as to what took place in the lower garden, whither Lady Margaret betook herself directly she was alone, and within whose walls neither Mysie nor Katie set foot that afternoon.

We will, however, be more curious.

As long as Lady Margaret was within sight of her own windows she walked, as we have said, with leisurely unconcern down the grass path which led be-

tween pretty flower-borders, now rank with autumn growth, to the corner of the wall, where was a narrow archway, leading to the well-kept and amply-stocked kitchen-garden, Donald's special pride and delight; but no sooner had she passed through this archway and become lost to view than the old lady's demeanour underwent a change.

A certain elegant languor which had been assumed, not without a purpose, dropped from her as by magic; she stood still and looked round briskly, shrewdly.

No one was within sight or hearing. Not so much as a bird hopped.

A slow, satisfied smile overspread Lady Margaret's countenance; a roguish, mischievous, exultant light sparkled in her eyes. Yes, she would do it; of course she would do it. She had arranged everything, cleared away every obstacle, and now was to reap the reward of prudent cleverness.

Why not? What harm? Was she not her own mistress, and was not all around her own also? It was only poor, dear, tiresome Gibbie (and Donald, who pandered to Gibbie's fidgets) who would

have raised a silly outcry, and forced her to give up a little joke she had in view. The two backed up each other, and for peace' sake she gave in to them, —but she did like *sometimes* to have her own way.

Thus cogitating her ladyship, as we say, looked round and round.

For the purpose with which her soul was big was certainly rather that of eight than of eighty years of age, and only absolute solitude could warrant it.

In her childhood Lady Margaret, motherless and sisterless, had been a veritable tomboy, and many feats of daring had she performed in company with her only playmate (that poor, wild, dead brother for whom her heart was often to ache thereafter), and though womanhood had in a measure dispelled their enchantment, Nigel, while he lived, could always evoke a spark of the old "Meg"—especially when Meg's foot was on her native soil. He and she would steal forth together from a side-door of the old castle, telling no one where they were going, or what they were about to do, even when Lady Margaret, with her grand English husband and her band of

little ones, was being made an important personage of as guest in her father's halls.

Sir Victor would laugh in his sleeve, affecting ignorance. Had not his fancy first been caught by this "wild woodnote" in the Scottish lassie?

And now Lady Margaret longs with a perfectly serious, deep-seated, pertinacious longing to mount a ladder again. She has spied just the little nook in one of her own apple-trees, where she could rock herself as she used to do in the orchards of Derringer Castle, out of sight among the thick, level branches, and within reach of the ripe, red, tempting apples. She would like just for once to eat an apple, swinging among the apple-tree boughs once more. Donald never dreamed of what she was thinking when he was desired to defer gathering in the fruit for another week. Even Donald, knowing his mistress as he does, has left the ladder all unsuspecting on the wall close by.

"I don't suppose any of them think I could move it," Lady Margaret nodded to herself, clearing joyously the intervening space, "but I am not quite

done for yet, Mr. Donald;" and she grasped the ladder with experienced hands. "Now then," cried she, bearing it off (it was a light one, and old as she was, her muscles were in excellent working order), "there, that's done!" and she came to a halt beneath the apple-tree.

A little breathless but triumphant withal, Lady Margaret next planted the lower end of the ladder firmly in the earth, having deftly inserted the upper against the part of the branch marked out for its reception. It almost seemed incredible that she should have got so far without let or hindrance. Now she had only to mount, and the thing was done.

It booted nothing that at other times my lady was not particularly fond of apples; she was quite sure that nothing else would satisfy her hunger now. To sit and munch, looking far and wide from over the canopy of moss-barked branches, beaten flat by the sea-wind—to swing her feet and wonder what people would have thought, and how horrified Gibbie and the rest would have been had they known—could prospect be more exciting, more alluring?

She tested the ladder; it was firmly set. She wheeled round, drew a breath, and once more slowly, searchingly penetrated the landscape. (The landscape consisted of about half an acre, but Lady Margaret must be cautious or nothing.) Finally, out went one foot. At the same instant something rustled in the wood.

Quick as lightning the foot vanished, and it was only the mistress of the garden looking up into an apple-tree who might be perceived by anyone entering through the lower gate.

No one, however, did enter, and the rustling ceased.

"Pooh! what a coward I am!" cried Lady Margaret, and valiantly mounted half-a-dozen steps without allowing herself to pause again.

She then took a look up, the tree was higher than she had thought.

Its branches, however, interlaced thickly, and she was right among them; one, indeed, had to be snapped off ere further ascent could be made, and she started a little at the noise, for her snap was

nervous and vehement,—but she started still more when the next moment a loud "Hollo!" from close by, fell like a crack of doom upon her ear. Clinging with both hands to the ladder she trembled all over.

"Whae's thon?" cried the voice next, an angry, threatening voice.

"But he can't see me," reflected Lady Margaret. "And if I keep still——"

"Come oot o' yon!" Another shrill, imperative yell.

No response.

"Come oot o' yon, I say!" and there were sounds of scrambling and scraping. "I see ye're there! Ye canna wun aff. Oo, ye may haud yer wheest, but I'm comin' at ye!"

"Dear me! what shall I do?" groaned Lady Margaret, still clinging for dear life; and in her perturbation she mounted a step higher.

"Ye're after the aipples, are ye, Thief."

A heavy thud on the soft earth followed, and "He has got over the wall," concluded Lady Margaret, petrified on her perch.

"Noo we'll see whae's maister!"

A running voice it was this time. Nemesis was upon her.

"Noo, ye limmer, ye wad steal Leddy Marget's aipples, wad ye? I'll tell Leddy Marget on ye."

Then for the first time Leddy Marget saw the humour of the thing.

And she was so relieved, so instantly, inexpressibly relieved by perceiving that it was only the boy Robbie, Robbie Maconochie, the Post's twelve-year-old son, with whom she had to deal—for all the urchin's valour and clamour—that she hardly knew whether to be more amused or indignant.

"Robbie Maconochie, come up here."

Robbie nearly fell flat upon his face.

"Do as I desire you. But wait till I am off the ladder," said Lady Margaret, hoisting herself with a clever twitch on to the coveted branch. "Stop there;" for Robbie showed signs of fleeing the scene. "Stop, till I am seated," repeated she, scuffling along and arranging her skirts as she went. "Now then, come up. And tell me what you are doing breaking over

the wall into my garden, and shouting at me in this extraordinary manner?"

"Oo-oo-oo!—my leddy"—Robbie blubbering freely, obeyed with crawling reluctance. "Oo, if I'd kenned! I couldna see! An', thocht I, 'Donal' Stewart's awa' to the toun, an' thonder's some thief loon after Leddy Marget's aipples'!"

"You thought that, but you thought something else."

Lady Margaret was herself again. With calm dignity, albeit her legs dangled, she beheld her victim inch by inch draw near; and pointed to his place upon the rugged bough as though it had been a stool of repentance.

And here, in this strange Hall of Justice, the luckless Robbie, in his own phrase, "catched it".

Apples and pears had been missing from the garden of late, and who had stolen them was clear that day to Robbie's captor. He had not come prying round her kitchen-garden, knowing the gardener was away, for nothing. Robbie might think that Donald would never know, and that his mistress would believe

in his pretence of thief-catching, but there was an Eye which was never blind, and a Voice which had once said "Thou shalt not steal". The little boy shook and blubbered afresh as he listened.

It seemed to him an awful and uncanny thing to have the secrets of his bosom thus laid bare. It did not strike him as in the least peculiar that such a solemn admonition should be administered from the boughs of an apple-tree by an old woman, who held on with one hand as she spoke; nor did Lady Margaret's earnest face look the least less awe-inspiring because a grey lock of hair had loosened itself over her brow, beneath a covering displaced in the ascent.

What he did feel was that he had been "fun oot," and what he feared was that his father would be told.

But oh, blissful hearing: "Now, Robbie," said Lady Margaret in conclusion, "I am going to forgive you, and I shall tell nobody anything about it. Robbie, you will not be punished this time; and you will be a better boy in future, will you not?"

Fervent protestations; Lady Margaret looked

thoughtfully at the poor little penitent atom hanging his remorseful head—and her lips, which had parted to bid him now depart and sin no more, closed again. Instead, she reached out a hand and absently plucked a large apple, the largest and ripest within reach.

Robbie eyed her furtively. A deep sigh burst from his bosom.

"There," said Lady Margaret, holding it towards him, "take that. That is to show I forgive you. And, Robbie, you may come to me to-morrow morning—come on your way to school—and you shall have another."

"Oo, my leddy, my leddy."

"You may come every day as long as apples last; and whenever you get one, Robbie, here or anywhere else," Lady Margaret spoke slowly and impressively, "think of what Leddy Marget said to you just now. Promise, Robbie."

"Pro-mise," said Robbie with a loud sob in the middle of the word.

But instead of holding out the hand of a recipient,

he thrust both into his trouser-pockets. He, too, could be magnanimous.

"Am no wantin' yer aipple. Keep it t' yersel'."

Here was a new suggestion; Lady Margaret thought a moment.

She had meant now to despatch the little fellow, subdued and enlightened, and once more enjoy her solitude and the success of her adventure; but—"After all, why not?" thought she, and smiled with Lady Margaret's own beautiful smile, as she still held out the tempting fruit. "My man," said she, in the tender Scotch accent, "here, laddie, take it. I'll have one too, and we will eat them together."

Oh, what would Gibbie have said?

Robbie, however, was sent off before Lady Margaret descended, which she did presently without further misadventure; and having replaced the ladder and seen that all was straight—indeed she raked the earth whereon tell-tale footsteps had been visible—her ladyship, owning some slight fatigue now that the excitement was over, returned to the house with the

same carefully regulated demeanour with which she had left it.

She was just about to enter the porch when a small figure emerged from the side bushes, and timidly plucked her elbow. She halted in some surprise.

"It's you, Robbie—well?"

"It was awfy gude o' ye to gi'e me the aipple," said Robbie. He had come back to say it.

CHAPTER V.

THE BROCADE, THE LACE, AND THE DIAMONDS.

LADY MARGARET, dressed for company, was to Gibbie's mind a "sicht for sair een".

It warmed the faithful creature's heart to bring forth from the wardrobe her mistress' best gown of rich brocade with lace ruffles at the throat and wrists, and to be allowed to arrange her white hair becomingly beneath a cap of the same rare old point.

On such occasions Lady Margaret would wear some of the few ornaments she still possessed, and Gibbie would hand them to her one by one out of their faded cases.

First and foremost would come the watch encrusted with rubies, which, with its long slender chain and bunch of seals, her ladyship never failed to select, having a great love and veneration for it. Furthermore she would point out to Gibbie (forgetting that she had

often done so before) how pure and clear was the light of the gems, and how exquisite the workmanship in which they were set. Gibbie would listen, all the better content that she understood nothing of the pleasure such a survey gave—only finding in the other's appreciation, and her own ignorance, a tangible and satisfactory line of demarcation. She would wait with patience for as long as ever her ladyship chose to be occupied with a trinket.

And one was rarely put on without being looked at fondly, and mused over wistfully. Each had its memory. Some indeed Gibbie knew it was useless to bring forth; she had once or twice been motioned hastily to restore a case unopened to its niche in the deep old drawer which, usually locked, stood open for the moment,—and she now never proffered any that had been so refused.

But of the pins and brooches which were still at times in use, Lady Margaret was fondest of two—Nigel's diamond pins—a set he had had made for her wedding day, and a single lustrous pear-shaped

pearl which hung from a loveknot of brilliants—the gift of a still dearer hand.

"Ah, Gibbie, if you could get me to dress up like this every day!"

"'Deed, an' what for suld ye do that?" Gibbie, possessed of the true "contramacious" nature, would fly out on the instant. "Whae wants ye i' yer braws ilka day?" she would demand, argumentatively.

"Would you not like to make a dear old lady of me—like the old women in pictures—with a fringed shawl over my shoulders, a pair of spectacles on my nose, and a nice piece of fancy knitting in my lap?"

"'Deed, it's no for me to say what I'd ha'e yer leddyship do." (Gibbie prim and would-be humble—watching her opportunity.)

"Only to say what you would have my ladyship *not* do. Eh, Mrs. Gibson?"

Then Gibbie retorted boldly, for she knew to what the sly laugh in Lady Margaret's eyes referred. "Whan ye canna mind yer age—nor yer health—nor a' the tellin's ye ha'e had—and maun stravage up an' doon wi' great logs o' wood——"

"Oh, Gibbie, Gibbie, it was no log, only a nice easy branch that Donald chopped up in a minute, and that made my fire crackle and flame cheerily for days afterwards! And look how well and strong all the open-air exercise I take keeps me. If I led another sort of life, you would soon have another sort of mistress; a tavered old body nodding half the day, and fretting and tossing half the night. How would you like that, Gibbie, my dear?"

It was an argument that was ever cropping up—the appearance of the best gown would set it going almost invariably—and though no apparent result was obtained, it is possible that each was secretly influenced by the attitude of the other.

Certainly Lady Margaret did not do quite all she would have done had there been no anxious, watchful, omniscient Gibbie to be struggled with or coaxed over subsequently; while her ladyship's whimsical mode of life was on the other hand loyally defended in her own words, if commented upon in the presence of her devoted adherent.

On the day of Lady Margaret's tea-party, however,

no such discussion as the above took place, for the very good reason that although a delinquency extraordinary had actually occurred on the previous afternoon, it may be remembered that Gibbie knew nothing of it. In consequence, the adorning of her mistress, which was to her so dear a delight, was in this instance unalloyed by any *arrière pensée;* and her charge was suffered to stand forth at last fully arrayed, not only without a syllable of admonition, but with a sense of poor Gibbie's pride and pleasure in the spectacle which touched her to the heart.

Once she had been a very pretty girl—but pretty girls do not make the handsomest old women. Lady Margaret, strongly framed, and with a broad, straight back that never ached, had, it is true, a wonderful dignity of movement in her leisurely moments, and a fine free tread at all times—but she had not the fragile elegance of some past beauties, nor the commanding mien of others.

Her features were still good; but much exposure to wind and weather had impaired the texture of

her skin, and it was only healthy, whereas it might have been transparently clear and smooth.

Moreover, the snowy hair, which was still abundant, and when dressed by Gibbie's art, an important factor in softening and embellishing the countenance of her aged mistress, was apt to fly loose, and straggle, and wave in all directions—as though in mockery of far, far-away days, when a golden aureole had crowned the brows of fair Margaret Derringer.

So that altogether it was a little difficult to make an ideal *grande dame* out of the "Leddy Marget" of the country-side, supposing preconceived notions stood in the way; and it said something for the quick wits of Colonel Kelso's young daughter that she had not for an instant been misled by the appearance of her hostess on the occasion of her first visit to the cottage.

Possibly Jenny had glanced at her father as he approached Lady Margaret. If so, she saw the deep respect in his eye, and the reverential bend of his neck.

Certainly she fell at once beneath the spell which bound him captive; and not only she but all the

youthful recipients of her ladyship's hospitality on the day in question, felt like courtiers hastening to pay homage at the feet of their queen, as they hurried over the misty moors to obey her summons.

Gibbie, with an instinctive sense of this, was never more fastidious, never more in breathless earnest about Lady Margaret's toilet and attire than in view of a girls' tea-party.

And the joy of seeing her faultless, flawless, splendid—up to the Derringer and St. Albans standard at every point!

Mute from very fulness of satisfaction, Mrs. Gibson, once more her ladyship's "own woman," would finally tender the fine lawn pocket-handkerchief which marked her task complete; and stand back for her lady to sweep downstairs, with so grand an air that Lady Margaret, who would not for the world have wounded her by flippancy at such a crisis, had much ado not to burst out laughing in her face.

What a rating she had escaped by Gibbie's ignorance of the ladder escapade!

Yet when the hidden mirth had evanesced, it was

something of a pensive countenance which met itself in the mirror over Lady Margaret's mantelpiece. With the rich brocade, the old lace, and the diamond ornaments, there seldom failed to steal a little thrill of sadness through their wearer's veins.

When she could be bustling about, in and out, in her everyday attire—when the poor were to be fed, the sick doctored, the business of the day despatched —memories of other days could be cheerily set aside; in holier hours they could bear their part in the soul's exaltation and the vistas of faith; but when merely arrayed for the reception of visitors, looking like, and yet unlike, the former mistress of Alban Towers, it was often with a sigh that Lady Margaret rested her head upon her hand, ere wheels were heard.

To be sitting there alone—she who had once had so many about her!

How strange that she should have outlived nearly all of those by whom she had erst been surrounded; and that of the two children yet living, the one should be separated from her by half the world, the other, by more than half a world of another kind!

If only Isabel were nearer—or Robert kinder!

Or, grandchildren? She would have adored grandchildren; and at one time they had seemed to swarm around her—now each had his or her own circle, and it was a long way to the little hut among the sandhills! She had once inadvertently overheard this said, and now left it to themselves to offer visits.

Still she made no complaint, and it must not be supposed that the old lady was at all deserted by her kinsfolk. Sir Robert and his wife made a pilgrimage to the cottage regularly once a year—sometimes when, as Lady St. Albans protested, it was "horribly inconvenient" to do so, but "Sir Robert thought it his duty,"—and they always returned from the "duty" with minds relieved, and perhaps on the part of one at least, an increased sense of the distance between Devonshire and the West Coast of Scotland.

Furthermore, there were young men who now and again "looked up" their grandmother in the shooting season; and anon a smart young married lady would appear with a husband, to whom Lady Margaret would be extremely civil, and who would go away quite

pleased with such a creditable old relation—but who had never once seen the "Leddy Marget" of the sand-hills.

Of children there were very few in the family connection—and it was children, or quite young folks, whose company this girl of eighty most affected.

She found the middle-aged men and matrons too old for her; often engrossed by cares and ambitions, depressed by small ailments, or engulfed in domesticity.

She herself had always been young of heart—younger than her peers; and now length of days and much experience tended rather to shake off than to rivet the world's coil; wherefore she saw with the straight eye of youth, valuing for their intrinsic worth men, women, and things.

"We talk with Lady Margaret as if she were one of ourselves," said bonnie Nancy Muir, discussing the subject with Joanna Kelso—Joanna having picked up Nancy on her way to the tea-party, and convoyed her in a snug brougham which would defy the rain threatened since morning.

"We sit and gossip like anything," quoth Nancy.

"After tea—and Gibbie does send up a tea, and expects you to eat it too—we simply talk for ever. Of course in summer we go out of doors, and perhaps play croquet, but we really like talking inside better. Lady Margaret is such wonderful company; and when there are only *us*—that is Edith and Florence Anstruther and me (and of course you will be like one of us), she does not mind *what* she says any more than a girl! She is never on the look-out to 'improve' us. And she never says, 'Come, come; my dears—my dears,' as mamma does. Yet somehow, I don't know how it is, but now I think of it," pursued Miss Nancy reflectively, "we always do come away feeling a little sort of *subdued*; and if we have been sore about anything—one's affairs will go cross sometimes, you know; and poor Edie Anstruther had a miserable engagement, and such rows at home before she would consent to break it off; well, one day we were there, and she was sitting moping in the corner, for she never would speak of it to anybody, but somehow Lady Margaret got her by herself—and she cried the whole way home—and we heard directly afterwards

that it was all at an end. My parents looked at each other, and I heard them say the Anstruthers ought to be very grateful to Lady Margaret. Edie simply worships her—but we all do that. She gave Edie a pearl cross soon afterwards. She gave me this little turquoise button. She is always giving things."

Anon Nancy peeped behind. "There is the Anstruthers' waggonette. We are all in good time; so Gibbie will be pleased. Lady Margaret doesn't mind; she is not one of your over-punctual sort; but Gibbie's tea and coffee——" and she laughed in pleased anticipation.

Jenny, who had never seen her father's old friend in full dress before, had now to own how much it did for Lady Margaret's appearance; and though she would have readily accepted her invitation at anyrate, and like the rest had come prepared for enjoyment, it was certainly an agreeable surprise to find that so much care and pains had been bestowed upon the little room and its owner.

All the flowers Lady Margaret could muster had been brought into the house and gave forth a fresh,

leafy fragrance. They were not fine flowers; not w she would have had at Alban Towers; but they w sweet, just cut from the stem, and made gay spots colour everywhere. Then there was a big fire odorous woods and cones, mixed with good coal wh spurted flame at every corner.

And in the round window—(from which Colc Kelso always said the view was the finest in county)—there was laid out upon a damask tal cloth, smooth and glossy as satin, a tea to tempt gods.

Gibbie had been round it a score of times she was satisfied. Mysie had been in from the kitcl (under some feeble pretence; in reality to see how own cakes and those of Sandy Maccallum mixed, ; which had the place of honour)—Donald had pee through the panes from without, and one and all l agreed in little Katie's declaration, "It looks *fine!*

For Gibbie, with an eye to the occasion being t of Miss Kelso's *début,* had gone great lengths, ; outdone every previous effort.

Yet it was not that there was any exuberance

profusion, but rather that each item was the very best of its kind—that the hot things were hot; the sweets, sweet; the rich, rich; every confection was also light as air—(except the wedding cake, which, as everyone knows, ought to be heavy, and was—but baked to perfection). A small extempore sideboard held the overflow.

And now if anyone thinks that full-fledged young maidens of quality, accustomed to plenty at home, cannot muster up special appetites for such a special feast, they ought to have been present at Lady Margaret's tea-party. It was nothing but munch, munch, scrunch, scrunch, sip and sop for the best part of an hour. Coffee supplemented tea, and tea again followed coffee, in defiance of every hygienic theory—while we may be sure modicums of the wedding cake were secreted, with due regard to the purpose for which it had slily been provided—until at last even Gibbie, presiding in the back regions, was satisfied, and heard with equanimity the rustle of skirts, and the moving of chairs, as the party broke up.

"They're round the fire, and her ladyship in the

middle of them," reported Katie, going out of the drawing-room for the last time. "I'm to let the table be, my lady says. Can we call in the men then, Mrs. Gibson?" Upon which a hospitable scene, decently inferior to that of the drawing-room, but well appreciated by the young ladies' attendants, was enacted in the kitchen. No one ever went away hungry from Lady Margaret's door, front or back.

And now for some considerable time the little house was very quiet, almost as quiet as it would have been at that hour on an ordinary day. The brisk chatter interspersed by bursts of girlish laughter, which had rung out during the merry meal, softened to a low hum, indistinctly heard by those outside the room wherein the party was assembled, and absolutely inaudible through the doors which intervened between the two groups.

It was the witching twilight hour, when no one thinks too closely of what is said, nor looks too narrowly at the face of the speaker. Lady Margaret, who had enjoyed herself to the top of her bent, when presiding at her well-spread board, but who had still

been the hostess—even the old lady—entertaining her younger neighbours, gradually forgot the stiff brocade and ruffles, the white hair with its costly covering, the wrinkled hands and the lawn handkerchief.

The latter lay under the tea-table, where it had slipped from her lap. Of the hands, one held the poker, with which she every now and then administered a reminder to the smouldering logs that were too lazy to flame, and the other was round Jenny Kelso's waist —Jenny being nearest the low stool, on which by sole distinction from the rest, who clustered upon the hearthrug, pure and simple—Lady Margaret sat.

"There's only one stool, and I think the eldest of the party ought to have it," she had announced. You would have thought she was twenty by the manner of the claim.

Would it be fair to listen to such a confiding, unsuspicious, defenceless little assemblage? Would a cold-blooded ear, the ear of one who had neither part nor lot in the matter, not have hearkened impatiently, scornfully to the innocent prattle of four out of five, and with reproachful amazement to the fifth?

How was it possible, indignant matronhood wou perchance have demanded, that an octogenarian, o who had seen generations come and go, and whc own end must needs be near, could not mere encourage childishness, but bear her own silly pa in it?

Lady Margaret, if she did not understand a n velty of ever-shifting fashion, was quite eager in o taining an explanation. If she were informed th some authority of other days had given place to name unknown to her, she caught up the idea, ar investigated it.

She examined critically the latest cut in sleeve she was glad that ear-rings were shortened.

Furthermore, there was a new and delightful hairp which Nancy was sure that Lady Margaret ought hear of, a hairpin which never fell out—and one w extracted to show, and Lady Margaret adopted it th and there.

Presently the talk wandered off. Dress, interes ing in its way, had not a supreme hold on the affe tions of any of the party. Amusements, occupatior

mutual friends, tastes and distastes all were rapidly passed in review; and Lady Margaret—invariably listened to directly she opened her mouth—had as much as anyone to say on each subject. She too had her *grues*, her people and things she detested. There was one person in particular at whom she had taken a regular *scunner*, she averred. (We shall hear more of this person presently.) The girls laughed till they cried over her tale of encounters with him.

By-and-by Nancy began to giggle, and Florence Anstruther to grow red. Lady Margaret would have Florence confess.

Lady Margaret was keen as steel to detect when such confessions would not be unpalatable; she had never approached within a mile of poor Edie's love-story (in public)—but now the fun they had! Florence enjoying it if possible still more than her tormentors!

At length the girls rose to go. "Dear Lady Margaret, we have been so happy. You won't be very long before you ask us again, will you?"

"Lady Margaret"—Edith it was who spoke this time, Edith with a thoughtful look, more natural to

her young face than the mirthful dimples into which it had been beguiled—"I can't think how you can be so—when we are all talking such nonsense—I mean about our marriages, and—future lives—and—and *you* know—doesn't it seem strange to you, strange and unreal? You see we forget you are not just one of us, with everything before you," she broke off, looking wistfully.

Lady Margaret laid a tender hand upon the brown head, and gazed into the large eyes. "You think my marriage joy is long gone by? Nay, my dears, the thread is only broken for a time—soon, soon to be reunited. When I hear you talk, I wish you husbands like the one who waits for me, true of heart and strong of hand, a man who feared his God, and feared none besides; perhaps," with a faint smile. "I think in my foolish way, that the world cannot yield another such as he."

She paused, her lip trembled, but in another minute she resumed blithely: "So there, you see, I have no need to envy your youth, and enchantment of possibilities. God *may* bless you as He has blessed

me—I trust, I hope He will—but mine is a *certainty*. Do not think you have it all your own way, little girls."

Again she paused; obviously there was still something she desired to say.

At length, "Perhaps some here may live to be my age," said Lady Margaret, looking round and observing attention bent on her. "And they may have seen husband, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren pass before them into the Unseen. Dears," with a sudden energy, "there is but one thing—one Love, one Hope, one sure and steadfast Conviction, which can make eighty happier than eighteen. I would not change places with one of you for untold worlds.... You think I have nothing? I tell you I have everything . . . Envy you? No, my little ones, I do not envy you a throb of your hearts, a sparkle of your eyes. I may say as my blessed Master said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of". I feed upon it daily; it nourishes me well.... Dear girls, begin soon, while hearts are tender and consciences clear, to lay hold upon this Bread of Life. Do not wait till sorrow

and sickness drag you to your Saviour's feet.
yourselves. Give Him your best days; your str
and vigour, and freshness. Then, when the pa
gins to quicken, and the world to drop away, pe
you will think sometimes of the old friend you
knew, who at eighty—and past—declares before
to whose presence she is quickly passing—tha
would not take one single year from her age—n
one year, nor one month, nor one day—if He H
gave her the power to do so."

CHAPTER VI.

"THESE ARE OUR CHURCH-GOING GEES."

TRIOCH CHURCH was a queer little lonely building, near nobody, and almost equally inconvenient for every parishioner.

To the latter fact probably it owed its situation; since it was manifestly just that no partiality should be shown in a district which did not warrant the erection of more than one sacred edifice; and accordingly rich and poor alike had to make their way up hill and down dale for many a moorland mile, ere they reached the clump of ragged, sea-beaten trees through which came a gleam of white-washed walls, and whence issued Sabbath by Sabbath the clanging of a small, shrill bell.

Lady Margaret had perhaps as far to go as anybody, but no one took less account of the distance, or was more seldom daunted by the weather. What

was the use of having a strong, healthy pony, she said, if she could not take him out on a bad day? What was Tom for, but to let her and Gibbie go to church comfortably?

"I believe, you know, that *I* could walk—give me time, and I can walk anywhere—but it would be too far for Gibbie," Gibbie's mistress had once confided to her friend, Colonel Kelso; who, perceiving the very tender and loving glance which accompanied the words, had let his own eye rest sympathetically upon the stalwart frame which the old lady thought feebler than her own, and nodded assent.

Gibbie also was very certain that but for her ladyship's kindness, she must needs stop at home on Sunday mornings. Mysie and Katie could foot it merrily over the good hill road—and one or other was always to be seen on alternate weeks, making one of the advance party, which under Donald's escort started betimes, and gathered in numbers as it went—but Mrs. Gibson knew better than to join the detachment even when, as happened now and again, she would really have enjoyed the cheery,

gossiping tramp. As long as Lady Margaret's conviction that she was the stronger of the two did not lead her into mischief, but rather promoted her comfort, the wise Gibbie would not disturb it.

At the kirkyard gate Donald would be waiting for his mistress, while the lassies rested themselves on the low wall close by—being also by way of waiting for their leader. Gibbie always headed her couple into their own pew; and the three walked decently in, after pony and cart had been duly disposed of—by which arrangement Mrs. Gibson was not entirely defrauded of her "crack" at the weekly meeting-place. These were the only occasions on which she ever came into contact with the Anstruther and Kelso households, and felt herself once more own woman to a lady of quality, amongst others with whom it was not a condescension to consort.

Lady Margaret would, however, walk straight into church, and into her solitary seat in front of a small side-loft.

No one ever spoke to her ladyship till the service was over; they knew she did not like it; that she

would be ready with her friendly nods and inquiries presently,—but as she passed in, with her firm tread and composed countenance, neighbours would involuntarily and respectfully hold back, while the humbler folk offered a silent salutation.

Even Colonel Kelso, if he chanced to be in the way, would have his attention fixed in another direction.

"There she goes, don't look at her," he had whispered to Jenny on the first Sunday after Jenny's home-coming. "There goes the finest old woman God ever made. She'll be lying in this little kirk-yard one of these days, and the world will be the poorer. I never see Lady Meg on a Sunday without thinking how we shall miss her old face when that day comes.

"But mind, Jenny," continued the speaker, dropping his musing tone, "in case you should be here at any time without me, that you never disturb Lady Margaret till she has said her prayers. I fancy the old heart must be pretty full at such times. If you notice, she never looks to right nor to left. Now, if we were inside, we should see her go straight to her

knees. And though 'tis the fashion to gape and stare, and know who's in church, and who isn't, and what goes on in everybody's pew, you'll never catch one pair of eyes roving. Whoever may be in the *pulpit*, there is One Presence in the *church* for Lady Margaret. There's a lesson for us all, my little maid."

It may be asked how Jenny came not to know as much of her own observation. We ought to have explained before that a certain delicacy of constitution had made it advisable for Colonel Kelso's young daughter during the growing period of youth to be so little at home, that though Lady Margaret had been tolerably familiar to her more juvenile eyes, she had almost to be reintroduced now, when years of discretion had begun.

And it said something for Jenny that the above fell neither on a careless nor contemptuous ear. In spite of a boarding-school education, combined with the privileges of an only child—the only child, moreover, of a wealthy and indulgent widower—Miss Jenny Kelso actually listened when her father spoke, and

with a few reservations—(for to be sure there are subjects as to which girls *must* know best, so the chits aver—and it is certain than whenever these crop up, Paterfamilias may as well hold his breath), —but except in cases so obvious, Colonel Kelso found his words of wisdom well received.

Something perhaps was due to his star and medals.

"Papa has been a great deal about the world, Nancy."

"Yes, indeed; we all know that. It is not merely that Colonel Kelso has seen so much foreign service, but he travelled between whiles on his own account, my father says. And certainly one can hardly mention a place he has not either been to, or knows about."

"I am sure *I* can't," said Jenny, who was not great at geography.

"He was well known at several of the European courts, was he not? And went to Embassy balls, and Coronations—and all sorts of great ceremonies! Just think of it!"

"Papa says it was part of his education." Jenny demure, but proud of heart.

"Dear! How I wish it were part of mine!" And for a full minute after the above fervent ejaculation, both pretty maidens would be quite silent, mute before the great idea.

So that when Colonel Kelso, with his stately shoulders well set, and hand in readiness to remove his hat at the first desirable moment, approached his old friend on her issuing from the church door, service over, neither his daughter nor any of her youthful contemporaries were inclined to bustle past. It was known to all with what eyes the colonel beheld Lady Margaret.

And he had been the companion of princesses —had trodden the chambers of kings! There was not one but would have been well pleased to be distinguished by him as was the aged widow—the "Leddy Marget" whose oddities and whimsicalities were familiar to all the country-side.

Taking their cue perchance from him, they would linger round, and Leddy Marget had a word and

nod for everyone; so that her pathway through the kirkyard to her little humble cart was always something of a Royal Progress.

. . . . .

Winter was over and spring had come. People who had been away on divers trips and jaunts had either returned to country quarters or were settled in London for the season; and Lady Margaret St. Albans, who of all her neighbours had not stirred from her own fireside during the intermediate months, heard with satisfaction of the reappearance of those whose society she most valued, and most missed when the annual separation took place.

The Anstruthers, a large family party, were once more reinstalled at Gorsie Knowe, the Muirs at Muirtown, and Colonel Kelso and his daughter at Lochmadden House.

From the two former she heard of the expected arrival of the latter; but as this was to take place on a Friday evening, the old lady, who was not exacting, looked forward to having her first sight of the

tall figure with its dainty appendage at Trioch Church.

It was something of a disappointment not to be met by the colonel's cobs turning away from the gate, to seek their usual temporary stable.

"They can't have come, Gibbie."

"Oo, they're come," replied Gibbie; but she too looked round perplexed. "Donald heard they were back, an' met the luggage upo' the road forbye. Maybe they're late," she suggested as an afterthought.

"They are always so punctual!" murmured Lady Margaret, somewhat disturbed. "I hope—I do hope nothing is wrong," and for once she broke through her practice, and accosted one of the Lochmadden men who stood near, and put his pipe in his pocket as her ladyship descended.

"I don't see Colonel Kelso's carriage, John?"

"They're awa' in, my leddy." John, who was 'dull o' hearin'," caught the words "Colonel Kelso" only, and made haste to reply as he conceived suitably; and it was thus owing to his deafness, joined

to the fluster occasioned by so unwonted a departure on the part of his interrogator, that she said her prayers in peace that morning. For had Lady Margaret known what she was going to know, all the effort in the world would hardly have kept her mind from wandering.

Out she stepped, however, serene and cheerful, with the look of peace upon her well-worn countenance which all knew as "Leddy Marget's Sunday look"—and waiting for her outside, as she guessed they would be, were Colonel Kelso and Jenny.

"Welcome home again, Charles. I am a selfish old body, who is always glad when my friends have had their outing, and are done with it. We stay-at-homes feel lonesome when you gayer folks desert us. But I almost thought you had played me false," continued Lady Margaret looking smilingly round, "for I did not see your phaeton when I arrived; and know I was late."

"Aha! Puzzle—Where's the phaeton?" rejoined the colonel, gaily. "You will not see it either today or henceforth at Trioch Church, will she, Jenny?

We have learned a trick worth two of that, Lady Margaret."

"You don't mean to say you walked!" cried she jealously. The sight of the cobs always vindicated her use of Tom in her eyes; and if the Kelsos, who had two miles farther than she to traverse, had taken to doing the distance on foot—but the idea had scarce arisen ere it was dispelled.

"Wrong cast again; no, we have not walked, but we have used our legs nevertheless," rejoined Colonel Kelso; and any person up-to-date would have guessed on the instant what he meant, for although the bicycle craze of to-day had not set in at the period of which we write, it had its forerunner in the then novelty of tricycles, and a couple of smart silver-plated tricycles were waiting at the gate, in charge of the colonel's footman. "These are our church-going gees!" wound np the speaker, pointing triumphantly. He was very proud of his new accomplishment.

Jenny too was smiling and exultant, while the footman, trying to look as if holding in a pair of spirited tricycles were the one thing in life to be

desired, essayed by the grandeur of his deportment to show himself impervious to the vulgar curiosity of the ignorant.

"*Charles!*"

Had Lady Margaret been a man, there is no saying what might have escaped her lips; but the solitary pronunciation of his name was enough to make her companion start.

"I—yes, I thought we should surprise you," said he, somewhat hastily. "Never seen them before, have you, Lady Margaret? They are quite the rage, however. And as for convenience—well, we came here in half-an-hour, and it used to take that and more with the horses; and now *they* are snug in their own stables—no bother of harnessing and unharnessing, of feeding and wrapping up—(I was always afraid of the draughty hole in yonder, if the wind were cold)—and only these two nice little machines to clean to-night, instead of a big carriage and the animals to boot! That is why I say you will see no more of the phaeton or brougham on Sundays, Lady Margaret."

But Lady Margaret was terribly perturbed. Convenient? Yes, it might be convenient—but there were *conveniences* which were not *convenances*, and though she held cheap as dirt outward trappings in her own case, she certainly—yes, certainly she did feel that this was going too far.

"The exercise is so good for papa." Jenny, who by this time had learned her old friend's weak side, here made an effort.

"Aye, indeed—that's what it is. Jenny knows what my doctors are always dunning into me. It was Jenny who thought of it first"—the father, true son of Adam, took up the old, old plea. "Jenny would have me try how I got on," pursued he.

Lady Margaret looked at him. "'The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me,' she tempted me. For shame, Charles, you coward," said she, with a gleam of returning good humour. "To put it on poor little Jenny! But I suppose I am very old-fashioned;" she half-stiffened, then sighed, finally moved through the gate, and struggled to repress the disgust of her soul. A few asides she did indeed permit herself,

one of which cut deep, as we shall see presently, but they were for the colonel's ear alone. The curious, ever on the look-out for such exhibitions, should not tattle of "Leddy Marget's" dumfounderment at the sight of Colonel Kelso's fancy equipages.

"I am very glad that you should encourage your father in the care of his health," observed her ladyship addressing Miss Jenny, with a certain grim pleasure in hoodwinking the assembled audience—quite a crowd it was, for not a soul had budged from the roadway just without—"but as your—your very peculiar conveyances might frighten my poor little pony, perhaps you will kindly get clear away before I start?"

"And you shall see how we spin." But though Colonel Kelso put as good a face upon it as he could, he would have liked to argue out the matter. It would have been so easy, he felt, to show a woman of Lady Margaret's sense that propriety united with convenience in tricycle-riding on certain occasions and under certain conditions.

He would not himself advocate their use at all

times and seasons. He would not be seen on one going down Pall Mall, or Piccadilly, for instance—he would not even care to tricycle in to his County Club, or Quarter Sessions, or Board Meeting. But hang it all! if a man may not go as he chooses on a lonely moor road, where every soul he meets either belongs to his estate or knows who he is, when may he? Lady Margaret herself owned no thraldom to public opinion—and why should he? It was simply absurd to let a trumpery prejudice outweigh all the inestimable advantages of the new invention; and surely a man who had been about the world and rummaged four continents should be above prejudices?

But as this could not be decently entered into during a ten minutes' chat on the road, within sight and hearing of all the country-side, the delinquent preferred to let it alone, and vent his grievance in mutterings half to himself, half to Jenny as they sped noiselessly along: and everyone who knows what a soft, springing, heather road is, and thinks of it on a balmy April day, can imagine the pleasure of such a progress,—so that by the time the two reached their

own gates, earlier than had ever been known on a Sunday before, Colonel Kelso, with recovered equanimity, was able to hearken to a suggestion of his daughter.

"Papa, I'll tell you what will do it."

"Do it? Do what?"

"What will bring Lady Margaret round!"

"Bother Lady Margaret!" A swift return of the colonel's frown. He had really been annoyed.

"Oh, but we shall win her over—far better than 'bothering' her. You know that we scarcely ever go there without her lamenting the distance between us, and that we cannot get over oftener?"

"Aye?" said he cocking his ear.

"Now we shall take her by storm," cried Jenny, triumphantly. "We shall be over to-morrow afternoon, before she has dreamt of our going. We shall say 'Oh, it's nothing. We can run across any day.' We'll tell her that she will never be rid of us, now that we can pop in and out——"

"By Jove! I believe you are right," said the colonel, brightening visibly. "Poor dear soul, she

won't be able to withstand *that.* You've hit it, Jenny; Lady Margaret will rise to such a bait at the very first cast. To be sure, we'll go to-morrow; and see her face when she catches sight of us!"

Lady Margaret was hard at work planting her bulbs; and wheelbarrows of mould, together with baskets of tulips and hyacinths, blocked the gravel path between her and Donald, when a couple of figures without any premonitory sounds approached. One nasty little cut Colonel Kelso allowed himself in revenge for his smarts of the previous day, and though he afterwards denied ever having said it, Jenny's quick ear knew that it had not been deceived. Yes, indeed; her father certainly did say, "For all the world like an old *spae wife!*" as his eye fell on the busily engrossed figure, accoutred, truth to tell, in its most dubious garments.

But if he did, the colonel protested, he had been provoked into it by Lady Margaret's telling him *re* the tricycle—his dearest hobby of the hour—that something was due not only to his position but to his age. He could forgive the "position"—he winced at

the "age." What man of sixty can endure such a reminder?

"'Age' and 'position' indeed!" muttered he, with a quizzical eye now—but the very extremity of Lady Margaret's *déshabille* reassured him. "We have all our cranks," he concluded, quite complacently, and met his old friend's joyful cry of surprise with a beaming countenance.

"Here we are, you see! You never expected to see us to-day, did you? But, faith! Lady Margaret, you will never know when you are rid of us now. As Jenny says, we can pop over at any time. Came in twenty minutes by my watch from our own door to yours!"

"Dear me!—Charles!—Ahem!—Did you really? Well, I must say it *is* good of you, and such a pleasure to see you. Oh, I understand all about it, my dear man," and he had a little friendly pat from the trowel, whose earthy leavings he did not in the least resent. "You know how soft the old woman must be to anything that brings her more of her friends' society. Twenty minutes from door to door! I sup-

pose I must believe it! But it seems too wonderful!"

"And, you see, either of us can run over separately at any time. If I have a book to bring you, or a paper——"

"Yes, yes," said Lady Margaret, delighted.

"And Jenny can look in for half an hour, and spin back, without making any *business* of it, as we have had to do till now——"

"But you will not let her go about alone, Charles?"

"No, no; not on these roads; she can go about our own grounds and to the village,—but not beyond. But the stable-boy, the one who used to attend her driving, and does still, for that matter—I have given him a rough article of the same kind—good enough for him—and the rascal learned how to work it in an afternoon! He can go like mad already, and will have to hold in to keep his place behind Jenny."

"Is it so very easy to learn, then, Charles?"

"Easy as twopence. Anyone can learn."

"Oh," said Lady Margaret, thoughtfully.

CHAPTER VII.

"AN' NAE HAIRM TO COME O'T!"

ONCE the tricycle subject was admitted to discussion, Lady Margaret showed that she possessed, what is rather an extraordinary thing in old age, an open mind.

She did not yield under protest—did not put forth the favourite formula of a past generation, "It is not what *I* was ever accustomed to". She gave the matter her candid consideration, and weighed the value of every pro and con.

"I can understand it's going against the grain with you," said Colonel Kelso—and was proceeding, when he was arrested briskly.

"My dear Charles, I haven't a 'grain'. If I ever had, it has been rubbed away—ground against till there is not even powder left. I have lived long enough to shed every theory I ever possessed; and

see all the fixed ideas of my youth totter. Pray do not think I am a stubborn old fool."

"It was just because I could never think that, that we intruded our new acquisitions on you to-day, Lady Margaret. As a rule you are as keen as any of us about a new toy." He exchanged a glance with Jenny as he spoke.

"Well, yes; of all the absurdities the world is full of, the absurdest is that of imagining, because one was born at a certain date, the clock of time ought henceforth to stand still with both hands pointing to that sacred hour! I must own I have no patience with dull stupidity when it starts groaning over the march of progress, and would rather blindfold every human being than have anyone see what *we* did not see—than have any more light shine now than was accorded *us* and our forbears. The groaners get scant sympathy from me, I can assure you, Charles."

"So I have heard them say, Lady Margaret."

"I suppose we shall find out how to fly next," proceeded Lady Margaret, entering into the spirit of the thing. "There seems no reason why we should

not—why you should not, at anyrate," she corrected herself, "it will hardly come in my day. But when I look back on all the wondrous changes that have taken place since I was a girl—most of all upon those of the last twenty years—I can scarcely believe I am still in the same humble planet that used to know so little about itself, and never troubled its head with its neighbours' affairs at all."

"Ah! you are thinking of the Mars speculations."

"Mars, and the rest of them. Upon my word, I really do not see why we should be so busy over their doings, when ten to one they don't reciprocate the friendly interest. I daresay they look upon our earth as a trumpery little speck too insignificant for notice—while we are worrying our wits to puzzle out whether their inhabitants have one eye or two! Jenny, my dear," concluded Lady Margaret, shaking her head seriously, "I wouldn't, if I were you, go hankering after a one-eyed Marsman for a husband. He may be very beautiful; but it would be a trifle inconvenient to get at him, even with an aerial tricycle, or whatever may be the next invention."

Lady Margaret, however, acknowledged with a frankness which charmed her auditors, that she had been over-hasty in making a certain charge, which had rankled in Colonel Kelso's breast ever since. He had indeed not meant her to discover as much; but now that matters were once more smooth between the two, the grievance leaked out before he was aware. "I must own I did not expect you to twit me with my age," quoth he, plaintively. "Jenny knows I never set up to be a young man; but if it comes to a question of strength or activity, I would back myself against two-thirds of the mashers of the day. I'd run my tricycle," emphatically, "against any one of 'em."

"And I would put my bottom dollar on you!" cried Lady Margaret. "Oh, dear, what will Jenny think to hear me use such words! The truth is, Jenny," passing her hand confidentially through the plump little arm so temptingly near, "a batch of American books came in my last box from Douglas and Foulis, and some of their slang is so very amusing, I say it over to myself. Slang is not pretty in women's

lips, my dear—I always stopped my girls' using it but now and then one *must* just break a rule, a 'bottom dollar' is so *very* expressive. Still Jenny Jenny, dear—I hope you don't speak slang—ahe —often?"

"Oh, Lady Margaret, you gave the show away j now," retorted Jenny; whereat Lady Margaret laugh and they all langhed, and the visit was one of t merriest ever paid the cottage.

In order to prove the truth of their allegations, was of course necessary for the Kelsos to keep up brisk fire of tricycle raids, and accordingly they seldc suffered many days to pass without one or oth whirring down the steep incline to Lady Margare nook among the sands.

Fine, fresh, spring weather tempted them to out of doors early and late; and the colonel, who h mostly done his work in life, and Jenny, who h not well begun hers, had alike a glorious sense freedom and the virtues of exercise.

At the end of a month Lady Margaret had beco not only reconciled to the new order of things, t

showed symptoms of being actually a little put out when one day, late in the afternoon, she was roused from a gentle doze into which she had fallen after a series of cottage visitations, by a great flashing of harness and trampling of hoofs, and a once familiar apparition wheeled past the window.

"I protest I had forgotten how you looked upon a box-seat, Charles."

"Almost forgotten myself how it felt," replied he. "But now we have got over the first burst of emancipation, I daresay we shall return to the old cobs with zest every now and then. Each in its place. To-day we have been at a garden-party, and Jenny thought we ought to go in style. The Lord-Lieutenant's, you know."

This was all right; Lady Margaret was eager to hear about the Lord-Lieutenant's; who had been there, and what had been done; appreciating the compliment of being taken on the return journey in order to be told that she had been kindly inquired after by friends and acquaintances.

"They would have put you up, had there l any chance of your going," said the colonel.

This also was pleasant to hear; Lady Marg liked—as who does not?—to be thought of and membered; no one was more grateful for little sages of friendly courtesy than she.

But it was occasions such as the above w brought home to the old lady the restrictions and privations unfelt at other times.

Once or twice on first taking up her abode at cottage, she had attempted keeping up intercourse her neighbours by the means she had been use at Alban Towers. She had gone to their assembl and in return had offered such hospitalities as could.

It had cost a struggle ere she came to perc that each effort was followed by exhaustion not t trifled with; and that the superior distance of country houses in question from each other to t left behind in Devonshire, made it impossible to pare the two neighbourhoods.

"Ye may say ye was used to gang oot at

Towers," argued Gibbie, "but mind ye, there was ae gate here, an' anither there—a' roon aboot yer ain. Ye hadna mile upo' mile o' road, an' lang, weary avenues forbye."

"They had long avenues, Gibbie."

"Maybe. Am no mindin'. It was ta'en aff the road if they had. The hooses was a' roon yer ain," Gibbie would repeat obstinately.

And in the end her mistress had to own she was right, and confine herself to the few places within easy reach, whose owners' names have already appeared in these pages.

"I believe Gibbie's real reason is that she thinks Tom would hardly do me credit," she consoled herself. "Tom is certainly not a well-bred pony, and he does get very warm on hot days. I doubt if he could get as far as some of the places, and it would be awkward if he just managed to get one way and could not get back. After all, it's not worth a fight with Gibbie," she concluded, cheerfully. "When I came to live in this quiet part of the world, I was prepared to give up society; and really to have three

sets of good neighbours within easy range, and dear old Dr. and Mrs. Makellar only a very little farther off—it is quite wonderful. I ought to be perfectly content;" and presently she was, and settled down.

"Thank-you for explaining on my behalf, Charles," she said, now. "I might perhaps have gone to a garden-party, even as far off as Castle Newton, when I first came,—but Gibbie wouldn't let me then," with a smile, "and now I have got out of the way of it. As for stopping the night—it must sound ridiculous, but I am afraid I should not sleep well in a strange house. Still I am obliged to your kind hosts for thinking of me," and she forgot all about the roar of wheels which had sounded so terrific when it burst in upon her slumbers.

Only as the party drove off did she revert to it, and that in a manner which delighted Colonel Kelso. "You and Jenny are spoiling me for grander vehicles," said she. "See how I have come round to your tripods! You glide in so noiselessly through my little gate, without disturbing a stone of my gravel, that I am half ready to quarrel with this," and she pointed

archly to the marks left by a four-wheeled phaeton and pair.

"She'll rake them over herself, once we are out of sight," nodded the colonel to his daughter, as they turned up the hill road. "I wouldn't mind betting a fiver that if we were to come back in a quarter of an hour, we should find Lady Meg hard at work with a rake, making the gravel fly."

"Well, papa, why shouldn't she?"

"Why shouldn't she? I never said she shouldn't."

"You spoke as if you meant that."

The colonel shrugged his shoulders. "Faith, it's no business of mine. But if I had a couple of men —she has Donald and that great hulking lad at the stables—to keep my place in order, I should let them *do it.* I'd not keep a dog, and bark myself."

"You said the other day you believed the boy was there solely to carry things to the poor people; and, papa, they do keep the place beautifully; there is never a sprig awry. If Lady Margaret rakes and hoes, it is because she loves to do it, not that she is needed to help. I expect," continued Miss Jenny,

laughing, "I expect, instead of helping, Gibbie v hinder her if she could."

"You have found out that, have you?"

For Jenny was now *au courant* with the lin which Lady Margaret's household was ruled, during the seven months which had elapsed sinc first met her wending her way to the cottage, come and gone so frequently, and been admitt such unreserved freedom, that as often as not i she who now instructed her whilom instructor.

A week afterwards she presented herself alo Lady Margaret's door. "Yes, Katie, I did not e your mistress to be at home, but—oh, Mrs. Gib as a black silk rustled in the background, "I kn was the prayer-meeting day; and when I set out not mean to come here at all, but William, the who goes about with me, met with an accident t crazy old boneshaker, and had to stop at the sn so when they said it would take an hour to r right, I thought I had better fly down here—a were so close—and wait for him. It would been such a long way home, and I thought

Margaret wouldn't mind. You see my father does not like my going about alone."

"'Deed, Miss Jenny, I'm glad ye thocht on't, an' her leddyship wad say the same. Come ben, my dear, an' I'll mak' ye a cup o' tea, an' ye'll sit yersel' doon an' rest."

"Oh, I should like some tea so much; but as for resting——!" Jenny laughed. Then she essayed confidentially, "You and I know that it is not good for your mistress to find visitors in the house when she comes back from her meeting; she ought to lie down and keep quiet, oughtn't she?"

"Aweel, Miss Jenny—but oh, she wad be vexed" —Gibbie struggled between opposing instincts.

She had, after repeated contests, succeeded in inducing Lady Margaret to look upon her prayer-meeting afternoon as a close time, and so well was this known among such as had the *entrée* of the cottage, that Thursdays were avoided like the plague by them. It had therefore been not a little disconcerting to find Katie in parley with a visitor who ought to have known better, and even now, when a satisfactory ex-

planation was offered, all was not plain sailing—st to let Colonel Kelso's daughter go away from t door!

"Look here, Mrs. Gibson,"—Jenny solved t problem ere another word could be said. "If y could give me some tea here—now—let me drink in the passage——"

"Hoots—Miss Jenny! I' the passage! Gae 'v wi' ye! But the kettle is upo' the fire."

"Well, I might just step in here," as a door v opened, "but mind, Mrs. Gibson, please, I am to cl off the moment I've drunk it, and Lady Margaret ne never know. *We* can manage it, can't we? I'll l my tricycle round to the back, and not come near house again, but mount and be off directly Willi appears. Till then I'll prowl on the shore. No, I'm not the least tired, and I should enjoy the sh of all things," and, overruling all courteous dem the warm-hearted girl set about carrying out her p gramme.

By the time she re-entered, having ensconced tell-tale tricycle in a snug corner, secluded from w

ought to have been Lady Margaret's view on Lady Margaret's return, a tea-tray was in readiness—indeed Katie had been furnishing it from the moment she was no longer needed at the door—and having eaten and drunk and notified her departure with thanks, exit Miss Kelso, and vanish all trace of her—or so Gibbie fondly thinks.

But half an hour goes by, and there is no trace of Lady Margaret either, which tardiness somewhat disturbs Gibbie. Her mistress is allowed to walk to and from the schoolhouse alone, as the small wayside building wherein the weekly prayer-meeting is held is barely a couple of miles off, and Jean Bowie, at the top of the hill, a "wise-like" woman, in Gibbie's confidence, is also a regular attendant. Hitherto Lady Margaret has invariably been home by half-past four o'clock—rather before that hour of late—and liking to be greeted by a little well-feigned surprise and implied compliment on her walking powers.

"Ye're early the day! Ye maun ha'e trampit!" Gibbie would exclaim, the while she swiftly disrobed; and for an hour or so thereafter the cottage would

be as still as a mouse, Lady Margaret recuperating.

But to-day the finger of the clock points to a quarter to five, and what should keep her ladyship out till a quarter to five even on a soft, sweet May day? Doubtless, however, it was this very softness and sweetness which proved too tempting, and Mrs. Gibson steps outside to hasten the laggard. "She'll be i' the gairden," she murmurs to herself.

But no one was in the garden—not even Donald, of whom inquiry could have been made. Neither was Lady Margaret in the small stable-yard, or byre. No one was visible, or audible, in either place.

Walking rather more quickly, Gibbie passed thence and unfastened a small side-gate opening into the road, not admitting to herself that she was anxious, but casting her eyes up the way even as her fingers fumbled at the latch—by which means the operation was delayed.

Gibbie, however, did not think of this. She shook the gate indignantly, and bounced out when free at length to do so.

The next moment she nearly bounced in again. She compressed her lips like iron to prevent a shout. All the years she had known, and scolded, and petted, bullied and worshipped the incorrigible Lady Margaret, all, we say, had never prepared her for such a sight as now met her eyes.

With Donald running by one side, and Donald's minion, Jamie Bowie, by the other, propelling herself slowly, but quite securely along on Jenny Kelso's smart new tricycle, there was the old lady, radiant with smiles, brimful of excitement, and too entirely engrossed in the sport to have eyes or ears for anything else.

A running fire of queries, warnings, and directions filled the air.

Donald: "No sae fast—no sae fast. Are ye a' richt? Easy noo, my leddy; easy noo."

My lady: "It *will* go to the side, Donald. That's right, Donald—*Donald!—Jamie!—this* way! There! Oh"—with a gasp—"Oh, I thought I was in the ditch!"

Donald: "Haud her heid straicht. See noo," guiding the handle a moment.

Lady Margaret (imperatively): "Let go. How can I steer with your hand in the way?" Then, with a sudden cry: "Oh, Donald—Donald! Turn it. Turn it quick. It *will* go!"

Donald (darting forward, grimly triumphant): "I thocht it wad."

How long they had been at it, and by what ill-luck the glittering trappings had caught Lady Margaret's eye, suggesting the escapade, Gibbie booted not to inquire; she stood there, the avenging Minister of Fate, with a face and expression which, when at length encountered by her eighty-year-old mistress, made her wince as though she were but eight.

"I was comin' to seek yer leddyship." Every syllable quivered as though surcharged with electricity. Gibbie's teeth—a fine false set, top and bottom—literally rattled in her mouth.

For a moment Lady Margaret's heart, as we say, shrivelled at the awful sight and sounds. Only twice or thrice in her lifetime (apart from religious considerations) had she braved such wrath; and the bravings had taken place at longer and longer intervals,—

but there was life in the old—no, no; we would say the Derringer blood still flowed in Lady Margaret's veins. Despite her involuntary start, she pulled herself together on the instant, and mute, but lifting her head in a manner not to be mistaken, she slowly and haughtily wheeled past Gibbie as though no Gibbie were there.

Afterwards, when Donald Stewart came in for his share of the thunder and lightning, beneath which he was expected to cower, overwhelmed and penitent, Donald took heart o' grace, and boldly stood up to his fellow-servant. What were they that they should dispute the pleasure of their mistress? *He* knew his duty, *he* did. And if Leddy Marget chose to mount a broom-stick he would haud its heid for her, let Mrs. Gibson flyte him an she daured.

"Am thinkin' ye luikit a bit o' an auld fule yersel', when ye was buddin stan' out o' the road," he wound up, undauntedly.

Poor Gibbie was sore at heart for a week afterwards that she had been so humbled before witnesses; and not her lady's best endeavours to make amends

—for Lady Margaret, when she came off her high horse, was tenderly anxious to wipe out all recollection of the scene—could reinstate her in her own eyes.

She never alluded to her disgrace; but the suspicion may be hazarded that had some slight, very slight misadventure occurred, had she been able to point to bruise or scar, or even a momentary fright on the part of the rash adventuress, there would have been balm in Gilead: else how could certain words which escaped irrepressibly when alone have been interpreted?—

"An' nae hairm to come o't!" she muttered beneath her breath.

CHAPTER VIII.

A "SHOCK-HEADED PETER."

We have said that there was one individual for whom Lady Margaret entertained an antipathy so profound that it could only be described by the expressive term *a scunner*, and everybody except the Reverend Archibald Proudfoot knew who that individual was.

With her parish minister, a mild and scholarly divine, her own contemporary in years, Lady Margaret lived on terms of the friendliest intimacy; indeed, she deemed his faithful discharge of his spiritual duties one of her chief blessings in life; but when through failing health he was obliged to call in the aid of an assistant and successor, and brought the young man over in due form to be presented at the cottage, Mr. Proudfoot's sponsor was conscious of an ominous de-

cline in the temperature of Lady Margaret's drawing-room.

Now we all know that there are many ways of looking at the same thing or person; or to be more exact, there are many standpoints from which he, she or it may be viewed. What Dr. John Makellar required in a co-worker for his extensive, widely-scattered, and thinly-populated parish may be summed up in a few words—he wanted a certain amount of ability, a vast store of energy, and a just sense of the obligations of the sacred office. These essentials, it must be emphatically understood, he obtained in the assistant appointed by the Presbytery; and having therefore satisfied himself that so far as could be judged off-hand, Mr. Archibald Proudfoot was the man for Trioch, he made, perhaps wisely, mince-meat of all trivial demurs and misgivings.

But Lady Margaret, long accustomed to the most gentle and courteous of men, was almost guilty of the rudeness of starting when accosted by brisk familiarity and a thrust-out hand on the part of an enormous creature who usurped all the light of her window, and

seemed to snuff up through dilated nostrils all the air of her room.

Moreover, the creature took the initiative; professed himself happy to be there; and called her "Lady St. Albans." It was more than could be borne.

Previous to the visit a trifling passage-of-arms had taken place at the manse.

"I do not doubt he is an excellent young man," said Mrs. Makellar, and paused so obviously in front of a "But" that dulness itself could have been at no loss to finish the sentence in some sort.

"A very able and excellent young man," assented the minister. He saw the "But," but declined to recognise it.

"I wish he were not quite so——" Another pause.

"He is exactly what I require." The "So" was ignored as the "But" had been.

"Well, perhaps. I daresay. I mean nothing against Mr. Proudfoot; still, I cannot help wondering what Lady Margaret will——"

"Mr. Proudfoot is my assistant, not Lady Mar-

garet's. I have to think of the souls of my parishioners, not of the tastes and sensibilities of a fine lady." Then the speaker's heart smote him. He had been betrayed into unwonted asperity, and resented the suggestion to which it was due.

"It is you who make out her ladyship to be so foolish," cried he. "She knows better. What do we want with high polish and refinement in a wild, rough place like this. We want a worker, not a fine gentleman!"

"Oho! Then you own he is not a gentleman?"

"Umph!" grunted the minister. Presently he looked up from a brown study, and, as though a decision had been arrived at, announced: "I shall take him and introduce him to Lady Margaret to-morrow."

And the morrow proved too surely that the wife had been the prophet, not the husband.

Mrs. Makellar, woman-like, was on tenter-hooks to hear how the visit had gone off, and from a high window espied the returning figures long before they appeared at the manse.

Distance lent enchantement to the view, certainly

A very old man, spare and bent, leaning for support on the arm of a stalwart junior, whose stride has been modified to suit the feebler pace, is a sight to touch any feminine heart, more particularly that of the affectionate and anxious partner of the former's declining years. Recalling the speed at which she had beheld Mr. Proudfoot tear along the same road when unencumbered the day before, Mrs. Makellar nodded approbation to herself once or twice. After all, if John were to find someone upon whom to lean mentally as well as bodily in this "Shock-headed Peter," it would be a great thing for John; she would not be too nice, too niffy-naffy about trifles. She would put up with a stentorian voice, and tramping feet, and crass conceit—"crass conceit" had just been arrived at when down she must go to receive the pair.

And certes, no crass conceit was written on her husband's countenance! One glance well-nigh dismayed the timid soul, so weary it looked, so rueful. Her heart almost rose in revolt against Lady Margaret, who, at her age, might have known better than to be cruel to one stricken in years like herself.

But if the minister looked tired and dispirited, not so his young assistant.

"Here we are!" cried he, jubilantly. "And upon my word, we had a capital time, and found an uncommonly nice, friendly old lady. You must hear all about it; but, meantime, ahem! the doctor's a wee thing tired," with a kindly glance downwards. "Give him a drop of something, Mrs. Makellar, and a good lie down on his bed. Don't let go my arm, sir; I'll see you to your room."

("And, my dear, he took him off just as if he had been his own son." Mrs. Makellar, with tears in her eyes, confided the story strictly under the rose, afterwards. "My poor husband slipped and fell at the bottom of the stairs—for the walk had been too much for him, though he never liked to allow it—and then what did Archibald do but lift him up in those great arms of his and carry him right up the staircase and into his own room? Then he must have wrapped the doctor up in his flannel dressing-gown—which was hanging over the bed-board—for I found him all warm and comfortable when I went up; which I didn't

do at first, knowing nothing of the fall and thinking to follow when my husband was alone. Well, down comes the young man to me as easy and careless as if he were asking it for himself—'Can I get a spoonful of spirits for the doctor?' Of course I was upset at that, for Dr. Makellar never touches a mouthful except at meals, and very little does he take then—but Archibald has such a cheery way. 'Hoots!' he said, 'it's nothing; come up and see for yourself,' and he measured out the cordial and made the doctor drink it, and—'Now,' says he, 'you'll take a nap,' and slipped away as still as a mouse, with just a nod and a wink to me as he went. The wink perhaps was vulgar; but, my dear, what is a little vulgarity in a fine, strong, kind-hearted young man, who can carry up your husband to bed, send him to sleep, and do a day's work for him in the parish before he wakes?")

The above might be a fond wife's exaggeration, but it had in it a strong substratum of truth. Beneath an unprepossessing exterior, and in conjunction with a good deal that his friends lamented, Mr. Archibald

Proudfoot possessed many of those sterling virtues which sooner or later command the esteem of those whose patience is not worn out by the surface friction which occasionally intervenes.

He was, as we have seen, "Archibald" with Mrs. Makellar within a very short time of his carrying her husband up the staircase; and albeit the neatest of housewives, in the light of that exploit—and of the value placed by the latter on his ministerial assistance—she could view with equanimity her hitherto spotless carpets mud-beflecked, her doors reopen after being banged to, and the cover of every sofa or chair whereon the Reverend Archibald had sat, crumpled and creased beyond power of words to describe.

No one, however, was to know anything of the little misadventure at the manse except the friend of Mrs. Makellar's youth, to whom it was confided, as we have said, with many injunctions to secrecy; so that Lady Margaret St. Albans, who had only encountered an uncouth, disagreeable young man, with an amount of self-assurance that was positively paralysing, wondered

not a little at the partiality and partisanship of the aged couple.

Her own tongue must of course be tied; no one had a more rigid sense of propriety on such points than she; but how could they, unasked and uninvited, praise a person so objectionable?

Mrs. Makellar: "I hope you think Dr. Makellar is fortunate in his assistant, Lady Margaret?"

Lady Margaret: "I am glad to hear Dr. Makellar thinks so himself."

"He does, indeed. I am sure I don't know how he would have got through the winter otherwise."

"But now the winter is gone, we shall all make a fresh start with the spring."

"Archibald is really like a son to us."

(Lady Margaret, *sotto voce:* "*'Archibald,'* indeed!")

"She canna thole Proofut," confided Gibbie to her intimates. "Me? it's a wunner to me hoo he aye comes an' comes; for if she's tell't him ance she's tell't him a hunner times it's ower faur, an' she'll excuse it. Na, he'll no tak' a tellin'. When I see

thae lang legs o' his trampin' doon the road, an' ken the luik she'll gi'e me when she hears whae's there, I'd be fain to rin oot an' stop him—an' I could think o' onythin' to say."

"You may say what you please. I will *not* go in." Lady Margaret, petulant as a girl in her teens, had, as she protested, come to the end of her tether. She was at work in her garden, and went on with the planting out of her geraniums as before.

But when presently her ladyship found that she had been taken at her word, and that her delegate had deliberately fulminated a smooth tale founded on the grossest fiction, whereby the obnoxious visitor had been beguiled from the door, she turned upon Gibbie, as sovereigns have been known to do on their subjects before now.

"It will be all over the place that I am ill, and you know well enough that I am as well as you, false woman."

"I ne'er said yer leddyship was ill."

"You said I was not well."

"I bit to say somethin'."

"And could think of nothing better than that!" cried Lady Margaret indignantly; but at the same moment she involuntarily put her hand to her head. Quick as lightning Gibbie's face, which had been as warlike as her own, changed.

"What for suld ye be angered wi' me for sayin' ye had a heidache?" she whined softly, as though coaxing a refractory child. "Onybody micht hae a heidache i' sic a sun. June's the month for heidaches——"

"Did you say I had a headache?"

"Jist somethin' o' the kind. I canna mind what." Then, after a minute's pause: "I was a'maist sorry to say it, the puir cratur was i' sic a heat himsel', an' sweer to tak' the road again."

But for once Lady Margaret's heart was hardened even to hospitality.

"Oh, nonsense!"

To tell the whole truth, Gibbie and her mistress were not altogether in accord about Mr. Archibald Proudfoot.

They had begun by being so; by chanting in

unison the praises of the old minister to the detriment of the young one; and by each inflaming the aversion of the other towards its unfortunate object on every possible occasion.

But while Lady Margaret's was a genuine, self-originated repulsion, that of her waiting-woman was but its feeble reflex; and, moreover, while her wily ladyship, who was something of a strategist, declined coming to close quarters with anyone likely to attack the position she had taken up, Gibbie could not so entrench herself.

Mr. Proudfoot was popular in the district; the "bairns" liked him—followed at his heels; he carried "goodies" for them in his pockets.

He stripped off his coat, and helped to unload old Dugald Smith's coals, sending Dugald in out of the cold wind.

He wheeled Widow Wilson's crippled lad to the kirk on a wheel-cart of his own invention.

At the close of a year the kind-hearted, good-humoured young man was a favourite in every house except one—and even Gibbie, though in a manner

proud of her ladyship's squeamishness, held her tongue about it.

"He lauchs, an' he yawns, an' coughs, an' sneeshes, wi' siccan a 'hoch-hoch-ho!' it's nae wunner a leddy o' quality ca's him a coorse-mainnered, plebein creetur," she argued with her cronie, Jean Bowie; but though Jean assented, as in duty bound, before the end of the interview she had insinuated so much in favour of the misdemeanant, let fall so many hints that it was only an exalted personage such as Gibbie's mistress who could reasonably take umbrage at him on the above grounds, that they were never again reverted to. Gibbie listened to both sides in silence when Mr. Proudfoot's name was mentioned.

At length, however, there came a day which brought matters to a climax.

Lady Margaret, on emerging from a cottage wherein lay a sick woman, encountered another visitor bent on the same benevolent errand. She would have hurried past with a brief greeting, but Mr. Proudfoot would take no such dismissal. He would

not forego his visit, but he would take Nellie Fairlie on his way back to the manse; and meantime rain had begun to drop—he must see Lady Margaret home. He unfurled a huge umbrella as he spoke.

"Do what I would, Gibbie, I could not shake the creature off!"

"'Deed, an' I think ye micht be rail thankfu' to the cratur."

Lady Margaret looked round. Gibbie's face was boiling; her own blood fired.

"Thankful? I am not thankful at all. I don't see what I have to be thankful for. *You* say so because there was a skiff of rain—the merest skiff—and you would have me shelter beneath a tinker's coat rather than wet my little finger—but *I* say it was very presuming of Mr. Proudfoot."

A pause.

"He meant well, perhaps, but I am accustomed to being obeyed," said Lady Margaret, with a heightened colour.

Gibbie was silent, with pursed lips.

"Even Donald would have known better than to force attentions when desired not to do so."

"Maist like. The tane kens yer leddyship, the tither doesna."

"The sooner he learns to know his own place the better."

Her ladyship, illogical and irritable, was not to be argued with, and Gibbie knew the mood. She bided her time.

It was sure to come; invariably it needed but the quiet hour of solitude to absorb all such moments of heated discussion, and her trump-card was still up her sleeve. Directly she re-entered her mistress' presence a little later in the day she saw at a glance she might produce it.

Lady Margaret was looking a little rueful, a little ashamed, and humorous withal.

"Gibbie, I am too hard upon that tiresome man. Am I not, Gibbie?"

Gibbie stepped up to the fire, and began to rearrange it. "It's no for me to say. Yer leddyship has a richt to fin' him tiresome an ye please."

Lady Margaret pouted. "It is you who are tiresome now, trying to provoke me afresh," cried she. "You know very well you are longing for a scold. You have made up your mind to have it out about this great Galloway bull, round whom we have been fencing for so long. Well, let us have a good tilt, and be done with it."

"I'm no denyin' I canna a'thegether agree wi' ye anent Maister Proofut, but what's my opeenion to onybody?"

"A truce with your humility, Mrs. Gibson; we will dispense with preliminaries, and are graciously pleased to demand your worthless opinion." Lady Margaret, aping quite absurdly well the airs of royalty, laughed at her own cleverness. Then, relaxing instantly, "Out with it, Gibbie, dear," she cried in her natural voice. "Let us have it, for weal or woe."

"He's an unco guid son to his auld mither." The bolt was shot, but its effect was not quite what had been anticipated.

"Oh!" said Lady Margaret, somewhat coldly. "Yes, I have heard that before."

"Ye hanna heard a'. If ye please to listen, I can tell a tale wad mak'—onyway it made *my* auld hairt girn. Yon puir lad—he's come o' puir fowks, an's had nae preevileges—but 'deed they say he's toiled an' slaved, an' keepit baith the twa o them, fayther an' mither (sae lang's his fayther lived; he deed a year syne) wi' bits o' 'bursaries' at College, an' the like; he's keepit a roof ower their heeds——"

"It is very creditable of him; but get on to the part that's to make me 'girn'."

"It's yon auld skinflint, Scarroch—Macfarlane o' Scarroch farm—wha's treated the puir lad *shamefy!*" burst forth Gibbie, well started at last. "Ye ken the bit hoose atween the kirk an' shore i' Trioch Bay? Mony's the day I ha'e heard ye say 'twad look braw i' a pictur'. That may be; but it's no an ower guid hoos', an' Scarroch had promised to tak' a sma' rent, an' let Maister Proofut ha'e it at Hallowe'en term. He was to bring his mither an' sister; for, d'ye see, he'd bargained for this 'ore ever he cam' to Trioch. 'I maun ha'e a hame for my auld mither,' he tell't the minister; an' the minister settled it wi' Scarroch.

The hoos' wull no be empty till the term—nor maybe wad the money be ready. Onyhoo, 'twas a' fixed; an' Jean Bowie it was wha tell't me, an' says she, 'I'm thinkin' 'twill brak his hairt, for he's been tellin' a'body, "My mither's comin';"' an' they think he's been hainin' ilka bawbee he had to bring her. Noo Scarroch turns roon', an' threeps times is bad, an' he canna afford to keep the hoos' i' his ain han's; it maun be sold. If the young man wants it, he can ha'e it; but he maun buy, an' pay doon the money. Like as though he had a thoosan' poon' i' the bank!"

"Gibbie."

"Yes, my leddy?"

"You are quite right. It does make my heart 'girn'."

"I thocht yer leddyship wad be vexed."

There was a pause, Lady Margaret musing; finally she lifted her head.

"The Makellars know, of course?"

"A'body kens, but nane can help. Na, he wadna tak' saxpence frae the Queen hersel'. But Jean Bowie's

man heard him prayin' an' strivin' wi' Scarroch (auld meeser that he is—no an inch wad he budge!), an' Jean's man said 'twas the maist waefu' hearin'; an' when 'twas ower, 'Aweel, then,' quo' he, 'I maun gang to her, for there's Ane abune wad haud me responsible if I thocht o' mysel' to her negleck; an' He's the same wha said, "The only son o' his mither, an' she was a weedy".'"

Lady Margaret breathed quickly. It was no longer the old servant's faltering accents that she heard. From out the mist of departed years another voice, tender and pleading, filled her ears. Oh, how dear had been the consolation offered by such love! "Mother, let nothing ever part you and me from this time. Mother, my home is yours for all life!"

As she gazes on the far, far scene, tears gather faster and faster till all the little room is blurred, and she feels rather than sees that Gibbie has stolen softly to her side.

"Dinna tak' on, my leddy; waes me, I suldna ha'e tell't ye."

Lady Margaret takes her hand, presses it, and

regains command of herself. "Bring me my littl writing-board, Gibbie, and come back in half an hou Be sure you come back. I am very glad you did tel me—very glad, you understand. Gibbie, I shall hav a letter for the post."

CHAPTER IX.

AN ANGEL OF MERCY.

A SOMEWHAT melancholy little party was gathered together in the parlour of Trioch Manse.

It was a dull October afternoon, and only one of the trio now assembled had set foot out of doors the livelong day; consequently for the other two the hours had dragged; and visitors at that period of the year being almost unknown, there had been no distraction for the thoughts of the old minister and his wife, while Archibald Proudfoot flew round the parish.

But alack! before Archibald started he had given them enough to think about.

Hoping against hope, the young man had delayed till the last possible moment communicating the decision with which, as we know, he had striven to soften the heart of the miserly "Scarroch," and though his mind was made up to leave the neighbourhood should he

be unable to transport his kith and kin thither, he had only that morning announced it as his fixed resolution.

"I would not go, if I could possibly help it. I like the place; I like the people; and as for you both, God bless you for your kindness to me"—the loud voice which so grated on Lady Margaret St. Albans was softened by the speaker's sincerity of feeling—"but you know what the understanding was when I came here. I left behind a mother and sister—feeble folks, both of them—sometimes—I doubt if I ought to have left them, even when such an opening offered; but friends advised me, and my mother herself urged it. So I came, leaving them to struggle along as best they might —"

"Not quite that, Archibald. We know what you have been doing; and if ever there were a good son ——"

"Hoots, Mrs. Makellar;" the young man blushed furiously.

"Archibald is quite right," put in the minister,

gently. "He does his duty, and has no wish to be praised for it."

"That's it, sir." Archibald turned eagerly round. "It is only my duty; and my duty compels me to decide on leaving Trioch if I cannot make here the home for those two I promised my father on his deathbed. They have waited for it patiently—*how* patiently perhaps even I will never know. But Ellen grows thinner and paler—and it is only when we talk of the little house in Trioch Bay that both their faces brighten. No, no, Mrs. Makellar; come and stop at the manse? No, no, it is not *that* would help us, thank-you for it all the same; you have done everything you could in that way already; but my mother is getting on in years—set in her ways perhaps; she could not live with strangers—nor would you—no, no, it's not to be thought of. A home of her own—let it be the smallest and humblest—she must have, if I can give it her!"

With this last word he had set forth; and every house and hut within hail had been reviewed by the aged couple subsequently.

But all ended with the same conclusion. Of the suitable dwellings to be counted on their two sets of fingers, only one was near enough the manse for the constant inter-communication necessary.

"And well does Scarroch know that," observed Dr. Makellar, indignation overspreading his thin features. "I represented the case to him so plainly, that he made a virtue of taking a smaller rental than he might reasonably have expected, on the grounds that one ought not to count lesser considerations when it was 'a kirk question'. I remember his very words, 'a kirk question'."

"What do you think has turned him round?"

"What turns every hypocrite round, and turns him inside out too—the love of money. Put money into one scale, and reputation, friends and a clear conscience into the other, and a hundred to one the hypocrite—the hypocrite pure and simple—will go for the money, and betray himself. Scarroch has always been a thorn in my flesh, but I never could actually unmask him. I could almost be relieved

that he has torn off his own mask, did it not affect so cruelly the interests of the parish—to say nothing of our loss and the poor lad's disappointment."

Thus had they talked and were still talking, when a step was heard in the passage, together with a slight rustling which made both pause to listen.

As a rule there could be no mistake about it when Mr. Archibald Proudfoot crossed the threshold of the manse; an inexperienced person might have thought he shook himself like a Newfoundland dog, radiating clatter; he certainly contrived to make the heaviest articles of furniture shake, and the most acquiescent, jingle. But now, behold! a black-coated figure stood in the doorway, and scarce a sound had been heard. The two within simultaneously gave vent to an exclamation.

For the face of the new-comer wore that unmistakable expression which means that something has happened.

"It is all over, dear friends." Archibald's very

voice was altered. "When I left the house this morning, I resolved to make one final effort. I did not tell you, for I feared even then it would be of no use; but as it seemed necessary to take steps one way or the other, I went to Scarroch, and ——"

"Ah!" cried Mrs. Makellar, putting her hands to her ears.

"I can guess how you fared;" her husband, with greater self-control, endeavoured to steady his tremulous accents. "He would not listen to you."

"Listen? Oh, yes, he listened;" a short laugh; "he would have listened till Doomsday, but ——" the narrator paused. "It was the playing of a cat with a mouse. All the while he had a paper in his pocket which was the death-warrant to my hopes. *Listen?* I fancy Scarroch enjoyed the listening. At last he took out the paper—put on his spectacles—looked at it up and down slowly—then at me over the top of it. I wondered what was coming. I did not like his face. It had a greedy, cunning expression ——"

"It always has that;" but Mrs. Makellar's interpolation was arrested by a wave of her husband's hand. He feared to miss a word.

"Says Scarroch at last, 'I'm afraid you are too late, Mr. Proudfoot; I gave you the first offer, you will remember. It was all a man in my position could do. You had the refusal of the house—but you dilly-dallied, and now you have no call to complain if it is snapped up by someone else.'"

"Someone else!" Again feminine vivacity had to be repressed.

"'This is the receipt for the title-deeds,' said Scarroch, putting it into his pocket again, 'and I sent the cheque to my bank this morning. Other people are more businesslike than you, Mr. Proudfoot; but,' said he, jocularly, 'we don't expect the clergy to understand business ways. You missed your chance. For the sake of your cloth I would have let you have it cheap ——'"

At last the minister spoke. "My cloth shall not prevent my letting Mr. Macfarlane have it *dear!*"

cried he, bitterly. "Archibald, I hope—I trust you kept *your* temper, and refrained ——"

"Sir, I thank God I was too broken-hearted to utter a word. Otherwise the natural man, you know —and there was something so devilish in his enjoyment of the scene ——"

"But you did not loose your tongue? Not even an—ejaculation, Archibald?"

"Not a syllable, sir."

Dr. Makellar rose and laid a trembling hand upon the young man's shoulder. "That was right. That was well," said he, fervently. "Well done, laddie—well done. But *I* have a duty"—the blue eyes gleamed. At the same moment there came an interruption from without.

Lady Margaret St. Albans' little pony-cart was at the gate; and Katie, in attendance, was already running up to knock at the front-door. What, therefore, the minister's duty towards his treacherous parishioner might be, had to be left to the imagination of his hearers.

Mrs. Makellar forgot to think of it on the instant. She did not very often have a call from Lady Margaret, and it behoved her to push and pat the furniture, poke the fire, and sweep out of sight sundry books and newspapers which littered the floor round her husband's chair, ere her orderly eye could be satisfied that the little parlour was fit for company.

Neither of the men helped her; neither, to own the truth, cared how the room looked.

And Lady Margaret, the moment she entered, divined how matters stood from their countenances alone; and knowing what she knew, could not but laugh to herself, noting the pink colour in her old friend's usually pale cheek, and the lambent fire in his eyes.

"Looks quite fierce!" cried she, mentally.

But the laugh died out of her heart as she glanced at the younger man, and saw how deep was the trouble written on his brow.

She had come to disperse that cloud with her own glad tidings, and beforehand it had seemed a

pleasant errand, easy of discharge—but now she must needs hurry to begin.

"I am afraid I have come at rather an unfortunate moment. Oh, yes," good-humouredly silencing a disclaimer, "I can see you were having a parish talk. But I am on business bent, also; so may I just despatch mine first, and be off? Thank-you. Then, Mr. Proudfoot"—the speaker turned in her chair—"*you* are the person I was principally anxious to see this afternoon. I thought I might possibly catch you. I am in search of a tenant—and report says that you are in search of a house; we might happen to suit each other?"

Lady Margaret's auditors pricked up their ears. The one most concerned murmured something inaudible.

"Being glad of an investment for a little loose cash," proceeded her ladyship, now addressing the friend to whom she could speak more intimately, "I have just completed the purchase of a small house close by you——"

"*Scarroch's* house?" It was a harsh, sharp cry

—the cry of a human heart wrung to its core—which came from behind Lady Margaret's chair.

"Does your ladyship mean—no, it can't be—but there is no other house," panted Mrs. Makellar, clasping her hands.

Only the aged minister himself was silent, with twitching lips and flickering eyelids.

"The very same," replied Lady Margaret, easily, as unconscious of it all. "Macfarlane of Scarroch Farm, you mean? Yes, it is his house. And I got the title-deeds from him last night. So I have lost no time, you see. But it is important to me to get a good, steady tenant—one who would not go flying off, and leaving it on my hands in six months or so;—so understanding that Mr. Proudfoot is likely to settle down among us permanently, it would be worth my while, from a business point of view, to let him have it at a very modest rental——"

"Oh, Lady Margaret, you can't deceive us! Oh, you dear, blessed lady, you were sent to be an angel of mercy to us in our need! . . . John—Archibald

—you hear her—you understand what she has d
. . . She thinks we don't see——" between
and smiles the speaker paused for lack of br
"John?" she murmured, appealingly.

But the task was not easy, even for John.

He cleared his throat, however, and ess
"What my wife says is true, Lady Margaret.
understand, and we can't pretend not to unders
We two have never learned to *make believe.*
Lord bless and reward you for this most noble
kindly deed. You had heard of our trouble, an
put it into your heart to help us. The young
is——" he glanced at a back resolutely tu
coughed, edged his chair nearer Lady Margaret,
craned his neck to reach her ear—"a wee thing
come," he whispered, nodding.

. . . . . .

"So now for weal or woe I have saddled m
with 'Archibald' for the rest of my natural l
cried Lady Margaret to herself, as she tooled h
her heart as light as a bird. "And whenever I
disposed to relapse, I shall think of him as he

to-day. Katie," aloud, "surely it is warmer than when we came? The air feels quite mild; and what a lovely sunset."

All the land, whether gleaming beneath the fiery sky tints, or grey in autumn mist, looked alike beautiful in the speaker's eyes.

She had not only issued victoriously from a struggle with her baser self, but had given up at her Master's call a cherished scheme, for which the purchase-money of the cottage had been set aside. No wonder she felt happy—nay, filled with that "peace of God which passeth all understanding".

Little Katie thought she had never known her mistress in such fine spirits. Katie's mother was a querulous old body, always lamenting and sighing over the days when she was young; Katie took note that she would hold up Lady Margaret as an example, next time somebody called herself "an auld burdock".

("What a look he cast on me! And what a grip those Herculean fingers can give! It was well my hoop was on the other hand; but even as it was, I

could scarce help crying out!") Suddenly Lady Margaret laughed aloud, and then explained that she was laughing at the recollection of something which had occurred at the manse, lest Katie should think her "daft".

She was not to know that Katie, so far from thinking anything of the kind, was mentally contrasting this lightsome dame with a woman fifteen years her junior, who called herself "an auld burdock".

Then Gibbie had to have the scene recounted in full; and though Gibbie often looked tenderly, wistfully, anxiously at her old mistress, her present bright, sympathetic approbation was something new.

Not a word was said of the long drive, nor of the late home-coming. All the faithful servant's furtive little expeditions to the gate, all the listenings and watchings with which the past half-hour had been beguiled were left unmentioned on this occasion; so great a day was not to be marred, and it was Lady Margaret herself who by-and-by said she would go t

bed a little earlier than usual, as she felt fatigued. It amused her with her quick perceptions, for once to avouch openly fatigue which was met only by a cheerful "Ay, ay; bed's the best place for ye. Ye'll be restit by the morn," instead of ominous hints and presages of evil—Gibbie's form of curtain-lecture, when limits had been exceeded.

As Mr. Archibald Proudfoot and his affairs are not destined to reappear in these pages, it may just be here recorded, that this very worthy young man met with no further check in the discharge of his filial obligations, that Dr. and Mrs. Makellar presided joyfully over the preparations of his small domain for the reception of its new occupants when Hallowe'en term arrived—by which time it was duly evacuated, and passed into Lady Margaret's hands—and that Lady Margaret's lawyer, to the unutterable disgust of the sharp-fisted Scarroch, succeeded in forcing him to yield it up in proper repair. He had hoped that sundry leakages and breakages would pass unnoticed.

Even chirruping little Mrs. Makellar did not enjoy this latter fact as did her husband. His gentle nature,

once roused, glowed like a furnace whenever "hypocrite's" name was mentioned.

He put on his greatcoat, and walked down road to see the masons at work. He met a plum coming out of the house.

"A'm jist i' time," quoth Davie Burns, knowing "Ye micht ha'e had a bittock typhoid here 'an' y bided a wee whiley langer, meenister."

"Archibald," said the minister, hurrying hor "I trust *you* will keep your temper, Archibald. Refra I beseech you, for the sake of peace, from spreadi this in the parish. But *I* have a duty to perform.

It was the second of its kind, our readers v remember. And so well and thoroughly was it c charged, that Scarroch found another way to a from the moor than past the manse from then forth.

One word more on this subject.

With November came a visitor to Lady Marga St. Albans; her son, Robert, who had omitted to ta his annual run north before, appeared almost u heralded, and without his wife. Florence, he sa

was terribly busy; overwhelmed with engagements; he himself had scarcely thought it possible to break loose, but had made a rush for it; he could only stop a couple of days.

Lady Margaret was pleased and touched; she fancied, rightly, that there had been something of a contest; that the feelings of the son had prevailed over the submission of the husband—and found Robert in this mood quite wonderfully amiable and agreeable. He was certainly pleasanter without Florence than with her.

Indeed he was so chatty and sociable that towards the close of the second day motherly yearnings found vent in a little sigh, "I wish you could have stayed longer, Robert."

Who does not like to be the subject of such a wish? Sir Robert professed himself flattered, but feared the thing could not be done.

"I am so very far from you," said Lady Margaret with a slight hesitation, "that if anything should happen to me——"

"Bless my soul! Who have we here?" Sir Robert

jumped from his chair with an alacrity that showed the interruption was not unwelcome. "What—in—the—world——" looking alternately at his mother and at a little caravan which drew up outside. "Friends of yours, eh?"

It was Archibald Proudfoot and his womenfolk.

"*Oh!*" groaned Lady Margaret within herself.

He had all the year to choose from; and she had been expecting the visit—not quite knowing whether she looked forward to, or shrank from it, yet feeling that such a mark of gratitude and respect was inevitable—but it was hard, yes, it *was* hard that it should have come upon her at this moment, in presence of the son who was almost a stranger, and whose sensibilities—she could not think of it.

Sir Robert was still looking at her expressively, his eyebrows arched.

"Robert, they must come in; they are—are—I cannot refuse to see them."

The rattling little machine crunched round on the gravel front, and creaked slowly away from the door.

"Oh, this will never do," said Lady Margaret, rising hastily. "Katie," as the door opened, "Katie, you knew I was at home. You should not turn people away. They must have seen me, too."

"If you please, my lady, I told Mr. Proudfoot so. Mrs. Gibson came out and told him so too. But he said you had visitors, and he would not intrude. Nothing would bring him in, my lady; Mrs. Gibson will tell you the same." And she put down a card.

"What does this mean?" said Sir Robert, carelessly glancing at it. "'With undying gratitude, A. P.' What does your friend A. P. profess 'undying gratitude' for?"

"Dear me!—n—nothing. Nothing to speak of. He—some people think so much of a trifle." But confusion was painted on Lady Margaret's countenance. "Give me the card."

("Trifle, my lady? Not quite. Now I wonder what you have been doing to call forth 'undying gratitude'?" quoth Sir Robert to himself. He was of a suspicious nature.)

"I suppose, Gibson, the people hereabouts bleed

your good mistress pretty freely?" he inquired jes ingly, by-and-by.

"My mistress, Sir Robert, is ane o' those whae let na her left han' ken what her richt does," quot Gibbie, oracularly.

CHAPTER X.

"YE GREEDY GLEGS."

"My dear Florence—ahem!" said Sir Robert St. Albans, addressing his wife in the manner most likely to secure her attention.

It was the day after his return from Scotland, and a certain little incident recorded in the last chapter had been more or less in his thoughts ever since it occurred.

"'With undying gratitude, A. P.,'" he would mutter to himself when alone; "and Gibbie says her mistress does not let her know what she does with her money—or what comes to that; for Gibbie is certainly the old lady's confidante, and as jealous as a cat of having a finger in every pie. Her ladyship must be close—deuced close—if she can keep it from Gibbie. She ought to be saving," pondered he. "What can she have to spend upon? She has a rattling

good jointure—all things considered. To be sure, she gave back some of it when she left the Towers; it would have been absurd if she had not, with all that stiff succession-duty to be paid, and the estate to be kept up, and the house requiring a large establishment—we simply could not have lived there without a proper income; and my mother had the grace to see it.

"She paid out large sums for Maggie's sons," ruminated he further. "I never could learn precisely how much, but from what did reach me the total must have been considerable. I shrewdly suspect their boys came upon her in their turn, too—if the truth were told. Isabel and her brood look up the old lady pretty well; and those Derringer cousins—oh, I dare-say among them a good deal is disbursed; still, to live as she lives, let me see," stroking his chin reflectively, "it can't cost her above five or six hundred a year at the very outside, and she took with her a thousand. Say she lives up to six—including her charities; she could not possibly use it up without those. Well, there would still remain four, and four

in ten years mounts up to forty—to say nothing of the compound interest. Four thousand pounds added to her marriage settlement—now, *is* it added?" shrewdly, "that's what I want to know. Or, does it dribble, dribble, fritter, fritter away among the 'A. P.' s' of the neighbourhood? It seems to me somebody ought to know a little more of Lady Margaret and her doings than anyone does."

Here Sir Robert looked long and fixedly from the window of the railway-train; for he was travelling south; and this mental arithmetic was the prelude to that call upon his wife's attention with which our chapter opens.

He had never been an affectionate son; and perhaps, for truth is truth, Lady Margaret, aware of this, and passionately attached to the elder brother, in whom she again beheld the "Victor" of her youth, had not cared to conceal her partiality from the younger's jealous eyes.

Robert had early gone out into the world, and neither father nor mother had deeply lamented. Absorbed in his own selfish interests, he had rarely found

time to write home—and still more rarely to visit there; and while for all the other members of the family it was the dearest spot on earth, it seemed an inscrutable, almost ironical dispensation of Providence, that the one who could turn his back upon it so lightly, should eventually become its master.

Still more strange did it seem to those who knew the inner workings of the St. Albans family, that the venerable Lady Margaret should only have *Robert* to turn to in her old age—Robert, who was now precisely what he had promised to become, the matured, accentuated, but otherwise unchanged Robert of former years. Not that he was without his good points, and had he married another kind of woman than the one he did, these might have been drawn out, and our old friend's last years brightened thereby—but we have seen enough of Lady St. Albans to understand that, tardy as were Sir Robert's dutiful compunctions in being awakened, they were seldom permitted to take effect without being combated by his wife.

As he sat and cogitated in the train, however, he fancied he knew what he would say to Florence,

Florence was not for nothing the daughter of a sharp attorney who had made his practice. All the luxury and splendour of Alban Towers did not prevent her scrimping here and saving there, nor all the length of her husband's rent-roll deprive her of the plea of being "hard up" when it came to a subscription-list.

He had but to throw out a hint that there were sharks in Lady Margaret's vicinity, and he thought—yes, he believed Florence would have the sense to see that something must be done.

"She is as hale as a three-year-old," mused he, thinking of his mother's quick eye and free tread. "And I—I hope she may long remain so," salving a tweak of conscience. "The poor old lady was uncommonly kind and pleasant—uncommonly glad to see me too. I shall let Florence know *that*. She ought to think something of *that*. Hang it all! I am the nearest relation my mother has left, and for that matter, the only one who is any good to her of our generation. Isabel is no good, stuck fast in India; and it isn't to be expected that my mother at her age should care to be bothered with grandchildren and

great-grandchildren, who are almost strangers to her. It is her own son—or her own daughter—who ought to look after her; and so I shall tell Florence. We ought to see that she is not being mulcted by a set of harpies. 'A. P.' indeed! I wish Florence had been there!"

"But what were you about not to get it out of Gibbie?" cried the lady, when she was told. "It seems to me that if people are cozening your mother——"

"Oh, come! I didn't say 'cozening'."

"Getting round her. Playing upon her sympathies. You say she was always inclined to spend——"

"I have heard my father say so. It was the only fault he ever found with her."

Lady St. Albans pursed her lips. "Indeed? Some husbands are extraordinarily blind——"

"At anyrate, I have never accused you of that, Florence." Sir Robert, in mortal terror of the ominous symptom, which had reference to a matter into which we need not enter, made haste to bring back the

point at issue. "The money-bags are safe enough with you; but I do think——" he paused.

"You do think—what?" A steely eye fixed him on its point.

"I think—ahem!"—(Sir Robert was never the same man in his wife's presence as out of it)—"I think, my dear, that—that you might occasionally pay a little —a little more attention to my mother."

"Is that all? You have said that a hundred times."

"If I have, all I can say is," he made an effort, "that my words have not precisely taken effect."

"I am sure I do not know what you mean, Robert." But in spite of herself, Lady St. Albans reddened a little. "I am sure the times without number that I have gone off to that dreadful little place! It always seems to come in the way whenever I want to go anywhere else. It is on the road to nowhere. All the other houses we visit in the summer lie on our route—that is to say, one can make out a route and dovetail them

in—but Lady Margaret has chosen to hide herself in the very ends of the earth."

"Two hours from Dumfries!"

"And where is Dumfries? It is itself out of the way—out of *our* way, at anyrate. But I go; I make a point of going. You can hardly point to a year in which I have not offered myself. Of course, I cannot help it if things come in the way; you would not have had me carry measles to your mother's cottage, overrun, I daresay, by all the village-children? She would not have thanked me. And another time it was she herself who put me off. I must say it is rather too bad if Lady Margaret goes complaining to you——"

"Set your mind at rest, Lady Margaret did nothing of the kind." He spoke drily; it occurred to him with a curious distinctness that his mother had seemed perfectly satisfied with the length and frequency of her daughter-in-law's visits.

Even Florence had a dim perception that such was the case. "I suppose you think that we don't hit

it off?" She looked annoyed. "The usual thing. But upon my word, I did not think *I* was to blame. Why does your mother never come here? Why does she choose to live such an unconscionable way off? She could have had one of the lodges——"

"Good heavens! Florence, what are you thinking of?" Sir Robert, in genuine agitation, looked angrily at his wife. "My mother! An earl's daughter! For fifty years mistress of this house! To live in one of its lodges, like a superannuated servant! Take care, madam, take care," a spark of noble feeling kindling into wrath as he proceeded; "there spoke your plebeian blood, Lady St. Albans. You showed the *garron*, ha-ha-ha! A fine thing indeed it would have been to see you lording it at Alban Towers, and Lady Margaret, whose pensioners we are—yes, we are, madam, for a great part of our income—curtseying at your lodge gates! Opening them for your carriage, perhaps! Upon my soul, there are no limits to the presumption of people of your class, my lady."

Never in her life had she seen him in such a passion.

It cowed her; to be taunted with her lowly birth was a new thing, and she trembled to perceive how dexterously her husband wielded the weapon, which she could not recollect his ever before having taken in his hand.

Supposing he were to find out its terrible strength? Of all things she dreaded her children being taught to despise her origin.

"You entirely mistook me, Robert."

"Glad to hear it, I'm sure." But Sir Robert was master of the situation, and meant to remain so. ("Gad, I've touched a raw," said he, to himself.)

And with the thought, alas! the righteous ire died out of his soul, and he only glowed with sullen satisfaction as he reflected that he now knew sure means of bringing her ladyship to book another time, should she be riding him with too high a hand.

Involuntarily she had winced and changed colour beneath his sarcasm, and the coarseness of his *"you"* when contrasting her with the parent he venerated for the moment if no more; and he experienced a faint

sense of wonder that he should have hitherto permitted his wife to regulate his conduct towards Lady Margaret.

For the future he would remember whose blood he had in his veins, and snap his fingers when the foxy old attorney, Gubbins, looked at him out of Florence's eyes.

"There was no occasion for you to be so rude;" she now struggled to look affronted and calm, but the tremor of her breath and a red spot on either cheek betrayed her. "Of course I only meant—I should never have supposed—the house would have been entirely altered—and enlarged——"

"House? What house?"

"The house I spoke of for Lady Margaret."

"You spoke of no 'house,' you said 'one of the lodges'."

"Because it would have been so nice and near. I was only thinking of *that;* not of its being in any way a suitable residence for your mother——"

"I should hope not, indeed."

"But her having chosen such a very small cottage for herself——"

"There's more room in it than you would think. Besides it isn't the size, it's the indignity I am thinking of. I wonder you aren't ashamed ever to have——"

"Indeed, my dear" (she must be hard put to it indeed. As a rule he was only "my dear" when Florence was in the best of humours, never at the close of a fray)—"Indeed, I am sorry to have vexed you. And I must say, Robert, though it is against myself, that it is very creditable to you to be vexed."

He shot a suspicious glance. Getting at him by flattery, was she?

But once disarmed, he was no match for her, and it only required a very little further soothing and explaining before peace was established. One point, however, he gained; Lady St. Albans promised to accompany him on a special mission of exploration to the cottage among the sand-hills, and to investigate its surrounding native population for herself, as soon as

sundry engagements into which she had entered would permit.

"Dear me, whatever are they coming at this time of year for?" cried Lady Margaret, in an outbreak of pure dismay, as she read the civil little note which Sir Robert had insisted on seeing before it went. "I —I thought—of course I am always glad to see Robert—but he was here so lately; and it is such a *very* bad time—just when I had let Mysie go for her little holiday! Poor girl, she will have to come back at once; and we must put off the painting too," looking ruefully round. "One should not think of such things with relations—but I did wish to have had this little room look nice before the summer; and if they had only waited till next month it would have been done, and they would have seen it fresh and bright. Gibbie won't have done up my old gown either. It will put Gibbie dreadfully out."

Indeed for half the day she did not dare to tell Gibbie. For an hour or so she sat at her desk pretending to write—Gibbie never disturbed her at such times—and presently a farmer's wife called, and Lady

Margaret, who saw her pass, was on a sudden accessible, and rang the bell for Mrs. Macraw to be shown in.

"She can wait, gif yer leddyship's busy," quoth Gibbie, somewhat surprised at the hasty summons. "Mistress Macraw is aye glad o' a rest; an' 'deed I tell't her it was no for me to say if ye wad see her at all——"

"Oh, but I will. Show her in, Gibbie."

The humble neighbour disposed of, it appeared there was another applicant for admission, but Lady Margaret's face fell when she heard who it was. Charlie, the painter lad, one of Mrs. Gibson's special *protégés*, and selected by her on account of his astonishing success in other quarters, for the redecoration of her mistress' drawing-room—an event of immense importance to Gibbie—was in waiting to know on which day he should begin?

"I tell't him maybe Monday, my leddy."

"Monday?" said Lady Margaret, absently.

Gibbie emitted a slight cough. "Monday's aye a

guid day for beginnin's," she murmured, still deferential and suggestive. Charlie had been taken on at her request, and she experienced the delicacy of a patroness.

"How long will it take?" inquired Lady Margaret, putting off the evil day.

"Ye'll no see him yersel'? He'd tell better nor me."

"You can give some idea, surely, Gibbie?"

"Oo, I can gi'e idees—but there's nae sayin'. Maybe a week, or a fortnight."

"A week is not a fortnight. I must know definitely, for——" the unfortunate Lady Margaret strove to brace herself, "I have—visitors coming. Sir Robert and Lady——"

"No *hersel',*"—something between a shout and a groan made Gibbie's mistress start, but it furnished her with a new idea.

"Really, Gibbie, you—you ought to let me finish my sentence," quoth she, peevishly. "I am a little upset to-day, and my nerves——"

"Are ye no weel?" Gibbie took a step forward. As a rule, Lady Margaret had no nerves.

"Not—not very," murmured the prevaricator.

"Ye'll tell them sae. Ye canna ha'e comp'ny,"—but this would never do.

"Gibbie," said Lady Margaret, firmly, "I did not speak the truth just now. I am in my usual health" —Gibbie breathed a sigh of relief—"but," continued her mistress, lifting towards her an eye that would have softened a far harder-hearted despot, "I was afraid to tell you news that was not altogether welcome to myself, and that you, my poor Gibbie——"

"Me? Yer leddyship afeard to tell me, your ain auld fule o' a sairvant!"

"It is so very, very unfortunate," murmured Lady Margaret.

"Gif it's unfort'nate, what am I here for but to bear the brash o't? They're comin'? Aweel," a pause. "We could ha'e dune wi'oot them. Mysie awa', an' the hoose no redd up——"

"I know, I know." The two women simultaneously cast disturbed glances at walls and ceiling, then finally

at each other: Lady Margaret had no thought of concealment now. "I should have put off anyone else, indeed I should," quoth she, earnestly. "Gibbie, I can't tell you how this proposal has—how ill-timed I feel it to be. But they mean kindly, and no doubt it is an effort on their part. You see Sir Robert came alone in the autumn, and——"

"An' if he could ha'e comed his lane noo," hinted Gibbie.

"It would not have upset us half so much. Still——"

"Oo, we mun bear it. It's the wull o' Providence —ahem!—I wad say, it's to be, an' we mun mak' the best o't. Dinna fash yersel', my leddy; we'll wun through. We mun ha'e Mysie back, an' it's nae maitter aboot the painter——"

"Oh, Gibbie, dear, I am so sorry."

"Ye've nae need. It's no for the likes of yer leddyship to be 'sorry' anent sic things. Charlie can come ony time; 'deed an' he may be prood and thankfu' ye thocht o' him ava—you that could ha'e had men frae Glasgy or Dumfries——"

"And my poor gown, too, Gibbie. They want to come on Monday. You will never have time——"

"Time mun be made. Or, maybe, Miss Macalister——"

"Yes, yes; send over for Miss Macalister at once." Lady Margaret rose from her chair, and shook off half her troubles. "You do cheer one up so, you good Gibbie; you are a tower of strength to this poor old tottery body. I have been feeling guilty and miserable ever since this letter came."

"I thocht ye werna jist yersel."

"It was mainly on your account, Gibbie. I was afraid you would think it was my fault."

"Losh me! yer leddyship!" But as Gibbie went along the passage, having slid the door handle round with special and noiseless respect, she shook her fist in the direction of England. "I ken what sen's ye here!" she muttered, fiercely. "Ye greedy glegs! An' I ken wha's sent ye, tae! The de'il himsel', seekin' whom he may devour! But ye'll no devour *her,* gif auld Gibbie can come atween ye: na, ye'll no

that." The faithful creature wiped her trembling lips with the corner of her apron.

"An' to think she was frichted to tell me!" whispered she to herself, a lump rising in her throat.

CHAPTER XI.

"HE WAS AYE JIST—RŌBERT."

"Noo then, stir yer stumps—stir yer stumps," Gibbie, bustling about.

She had bustled ever since the news of the coming arrival was broken to her, doing bits c jobs even on the Sabbath Day itself, though th not for Lady Margaret to know—and by the M on which afternoon Sir Robert and his lady wer was almost enjoying the forward state of prep to which everything within and without the c had been brought.

She had even had the chimneys swept—: necessary item, "but we'll mak' ae job o't," re she, with the talent of a born organiser; "the bit to come some time; an' it's aye weel to b the safe side wi' fowk like yon."

In view of Lady St. Albans' inimical eye, mo

cupboards were rummaged and the secrets of hiding-holes laid bare; while the very drawers in Lady Margaret's bedroom had their contents passed in review, sorted, and set in order. Gibbie, although a clean and comfortable woman, had not the innate neatness of some domestics. She could turn out her mistress to perfection—but she mixed matters behind the scenes.

All of this amused Lady Margaret; and presently finding that neither Donald without, nor Mysie and Katie within, resented the unusual call upon their energies, but rather the reverse—running to her with beaming faces for this or that instruction and permission—she herself took heart o' grace, and tried to think she was pleased by the unwonted prospect.

She certainly enjoyed one moment.

"I am expecting my son and his wife, Charles," said the old lady, as Colonel Kelso and Jenny joined her after church on Sunday. "They come to-morrow, and will remain a week."

"Indeed? This is not their usual time, Lady

Margaret." ("Probably looking at shootings for the autumn," commented the colonel, mentally.)

"No, it is not their usual time," assented Lady Margaret, "but I suppose they think the old woman is not so young as she once was," smiling gently. "Eighty-three next birthday, Charles. But, thank God, as well and strong as ever. I drove to Kirkintown the day before yesterday," added she, proudly. "Gibbie thought it would do me good; and there were things needed for the house; so Gibbie and I shopped about, and brought them back with us. I drove both ways, and even Gibbie allowed that Tom was so fresh he needed a firm hand to hold him in."

"Tom is a spirited little animal," said the colonel, gravely.

"I thought of bringing over my guests to Lochmadden, Charles, if you and Jenny would like me to do so, and could fix a day?"

"Allow us the pleasure of waiting on them first, Lady Margaret. May we call on Tuesday? And then, if you will say what day would suit you best to lunch

with us, we shall be only too glad to make your day ours."

"But Jenny may have visitors?"

"Not if Lady Margaret offers Jenny a visit." This from the little maid herself. Colonel Kelso looked at his daughter approvingly; as a matter of fact, a couple of Jenny's schoolfellows were expected at Lochmadden, and were not precisely the young people to do themselves credit on the occasion. He asked afterwards what she would have done had their old neighbour suggested Friday or Saturday for her expedition?

"Put the girls off," said Jenny, unhesitatingly.

To return, however.

"Suppose we settle for Wednesday then, subject to weather?" said the colonel, and paused, turning something over in his mind. "The winds are rather cold just know, would you—ah!—were you thinking of—is not it something of a risk driving in an open carriage?"

"An open carriage!" Lady Margaret pointed to the peaceful Tom, standing with his little basket cart

by the churchyard gate. "An open carriage!" She laughed merrily.

"Your little chaise is rather exposed—that was all I meant," said he, looking as civilly at Tom as if he had been the finest pony in the land. "You drive everywhere, I know; but I was only thinking" —a happy idea occurring—"is Lady St. Albans likely to be as strong as you? Some people catch cold so easily; and if she is accustomed to close carriages——"

"Very true," said Lady Margaret, thoughtfully. "I did not think of that," subjoined she, after a pause of consideration. "In my own mind I had arranged for Sir Robert to walk, while we drove. But if you think——"

("What I think is that if madam, the attorney's daughter, has to get to Lochmadden by means of a twopenny-halfpenny rattletrap, we shan't see her there," quoth he, to himself. "Catch her coming jogging over, packed in with her mother-in-law, and not even Lady Margaret's hen-flunkey to open the gates!")

Aloud: "Oh, the weather is very treacherous;

and you and I, braving it as we do, forget that others are not—have not such iron constitutions. If Lady St. Albans were to be laid up at the cottage——"

"Oh, dear!" ejaculated Lady Margaret, involuntarily.

"In view of that contingency," proceeded the colonel, with a twinkle in his eye, "I have a proposal to make. Let me send over for you, and send you back? Lady Margaret, you and I are the oldest of friends, let us rap out the truth, and be done with it. It would be an awful nuisance for you to have anyone laid up at your house, especially a fine lady——" (an indistinct murmur, which he perfectly understood, but affected not to hear), "and—just think what it would be to Gibbie!" ("That will fetch her," thought he.) "I never bother you to immure yourself in a brougham on your own account, do I now?" proceeded Colonel Kelso, perceiving the impression he had made. "But I think—I do think you had better, for everybody's sake, not let Lady

St. Albans venture across the open moor in Tom's cart."

"And let me come over in the brougham and fetch you?" pleaded Jenny.

Lady Margaret looked at them both. "Thank-you, Charles: thank-you, Jenny; it is a kind, considerate thought, and I am gratefully and cordially glad to take advantage of it. The winds are, as you say, *very* cold; and it is quite likely that Lady St. Albans may not be able to face them. I cannot answer for Lady St. Albans in any way. I know very little about her."

"But it was the horrible vision of that woman lying coughing in her spare room, sipping Gibbie's slops, and wearing Gibbie out with her whims and fancies, that carried the day," cried the colonel triumphantly, thereafter. "I saw her face change at the first suggestion of it; and she would have given up the whole thing, rather than run the risk. But she doesn't know what to do with the couple, and an outing to Lochmadden will dispose of one day. They needn't go back till late in the afternoon."

"I must see if I can do anything for Sir Robert," pursued he, presently, "though I hate the fellow, and can't imagine how he ever came to be the son of his mother. Or, indeed, of his father. Sir Victor was as fine a specimen of an English gentleman as need be—something of the old cavalier about him, too. And his son Victor, though not so handsome and striking, resembled him in many ways. But Robert was always a sneaking, cold-blooded, respectable rascal. Must have harked back to some old forgotten strain in the St. Albans family—for I'll be hanged if it's the Derringers he takes after. A sad pity he's the only one left. Poor Louis, a delicate, high-bred little man, with fair hair and a taste for the fine arts, would have been a better son to Lady Margaret—aye, and a better head of the family too—than Robert."

All of which, however, did not obviate the necessity of looking after Sir Robert for Lady Margaret's sake, and to ease her of the burden which Colonel Kelso more than suspected was already looming on her horizon in colours sufficiently dark—

wherefore, though not without a wry face, he set himself to concoct various little plans for the week. It was not to be thought of that an interloper should be permitted to hang about the cottage, flustering its inmates, and interfering with their avocations; he must be forcibly extracted, if he would not come of his own free will.

Lady Margaret on her part also had an idea that this would be the case. "'Tis a comfort I have let the Kelsos know," reflected she.

And when Monday came, it was one of the most glorious days of the year.

Following in her mind's eye the travellers as they sped Northwards, she pictured them from point to point, now at Liverpool, now at Preston, now at Carlisle—recalled that they would catch a gleam of waters at Morecambe Bay, and a stretch of moorland once across the Border—and as the afternoon wore on, took a proprietor's pride in the red March sunset which overspread sky and land, and which they must now be hurrying, as it were, to meet.

By six o'clock she was dressed and waiting; and

the sun sinking in unclouded splendour, filled the room in which she sat.

"A'm thinkin' they suld be here," said Gibbie, coming in for a look at her. "Are ye a' richt? A wee drap wine an' water? There's time. They're no past the hill-tap, for I've set Jamie to watch."

"Oh, I don't want anything. Really, Gibbie."

"Maybe a bit mair wood upo' the fire? He's steekit ye plenty, I see," glancing at the neatly stacked logs within the grate.

"But don't extinguish the blaze," cried Lady Margaret, anxiously. She was always great in her fires, liking them clear and lively; they made, she said, the room look "companionable"; a dull grate had a lonely look.

"A'things ready aboon," quoth Gibbie next, in a sort of whisper, she was too much agitated to speak plainly; "an' Donald's here, waitin' to help wi' the luggage. I tell't him to stan' the gate open, an' come into the hoose. She aye bring a big trunk, forbye—— 'Sh, what's yon?" suddenly stiffening into an attitude of attention—while Lady Margaret also

started upright. Gibbie's eyes met hers, but neither spoke for a full half-minute.

Then, "Aye; it's them," said the former, hoarsely, and she was hurrying out; but "Oh, Gibbie—Gibbie, don't go—I mean could you not wait here till they come?" Lady Margaret amended her first imploring cry, with a show of dignity, "You may be wanted—I like to have you near."

Swift as lightning Gibbie was at her side. "Ye manna let *them* see that, my dawtie,"—but the next moment it was, "Yer leddyship will receive them at the door? I'll be ahint ye," lower. "See noo, what a fine evenin' for their arrival!" insinuated she, conducting her charge along. "Ye'll say what a gran' day it's been for their journey, and the trains mun ha'e keepit their times,"—(Lady Margaret was often thus instructed in opening discourse, as we know)—"an' ye'll hope they're no fatiguit?—an' maybe she'll gang to her room sae soon's she's had her tea"—a cheering thought—"sae noo, this i' yer han'," hastily picking up the handkerchief which Lady Margaret in her trepidation had let fall, and stepping into the

rear, as the fly with its occupants creaked to the door.

"There is my mother waiting to welcome us!" exclaimed Sir Robert at the same moment.

He was in high good-humour, and even his wife, tired and chilly, owned the influence of a bright, warm, sweet-scented apartment, and instantaneous refreshment daintily served.

"Dear! how nice it all looks!" she graciously observed, setting down her cup, and reclining in her chair. "It was quite cold when we left Devonshire yesterday morning. We slept at Crewe. It was a little out of our way, but we wanted to see some dear people, Lord and Lady ——"

"We won't bother my mother about them," interrupted Sir Robert somewhat hastily. "Glad to see you looking so well, ma'am: better than when I was here last, I think."

"It has been a mild, open winter," said Lady Margaret, cheerfully.

"That must make a great difference to you." It was her daughter-in-law who interposed, mindful of

private orders not to sit by and look "out of it". "In hard winters you must be in danger of being snowed up," further remarked she, by way of being pleasant.

"Oh, no; the snow never lies here," replied Lady Margaret.

"Dear! I thought it always lay in Scotland."

"That's all Florence knows about Scotland," said Sir Robert, with a little uneasy laugh. Already he was beginning to feel that he had his work cut out before him—but here, to the relief of all, an apparition in black silk and imposing cap appeared at the door.

"If her leddyship wad like to rest, her room is ready. The maids ha'e unpackit," said Gibbie in her most proper accents.

Lady Margaret looked at her visitors, but Sir Robert alone had his hand ready—with all his shortcomings, he was still in certain ways to the manner born. "Ha! Mrs. Gibson, how d'ye do? No need to ask. You and your mistress both look as fit as

possible. Florence, my dear, you remember Mrs. Gibson?" She inclined condescendingly. "Now, the best thing you can do is to put yourself under her care," continued her husband, foreseeing release; "get a good rest, while I take a stroll outside." And the party broke up.

Presently Gibbie stole back.

"She's upo' the sofy, very comfortable. Maybe she'll sleep. The room's fine an' warm, an' I ha'e happit her feet. He's awa' up the road. Ahem!"

"Ahem!" meant "How did you get on? Is all going well?"

Lady Margaret was sitting still in her chair, leaning her head upon her hand; she held out the other as her humble friend drew near.

"He means to be kind, Gibbie—but"—a sigh—"the others were different. Gibbie, *you* know."

Gibbie's eyelids sank; Gibbie made a motion of assent; at such moments her sympathy was never expressed in words.

"Victor would have been sitting by me, with his arm round his mother's neck," murmured Lady Mar-

garet, half to herself. "Louis would have laid his head upon my lap. Sometimes he would fall asleep like that. You remember, Gibbie, don't you?" looking up with wistful eyes, "how you once found him so? It was after he met with that—disappointment. His trouble lay heavy on him, and he came to pour it out; and when we had talked and talked, and there was nothing more to say, he seemed just to like to feel me there, and rested upon me like a child. I heard his breathing grow more quiet and regular; and you came in, Gibbie, and looked at me, and motioned that he was asleep. I think afterwards he told you about it, did he not, Gibbie?"

"It kind o' relieved him to tell, my leddy," apologetically.

"So it did; so it ought. The sympathy of those who love us counts for much at such times. Dear Louis!—my 'Benjamin!' He has been at rest for twenty years—yet it seems like yesterday! He had rather a troubled life, poor boy; his health was never so good as that of the others ——"

("This'll no do," thought Gibbie. For if Lady

Margaret became entangled too deeply in memories of other days, she was apt to be distrait and pensive for some time thereafter, and it most particularly behoved her to be bright and keen that evening.)

Accordingly she firmly but respectfully put back upon her mistress' knee the hand which still clasped hers, and drew up the little shawl which had slipped from Lady Margaret's shoulders.

"There's a time for a' things," she said, but the words did not sound harsh as when written here. "We can talk when we're oor lane, but no the day, my leddy; no whan we've them wi' us that are strangers to the hoose ——"

"And isn't *that* strange?" said Lady Margaret, quickly. "My own son!"

"Aweel, he was aye jist—Rōbert."

Involuntarily the thought found vent; but Gibbie, albeit a little red in the face, did not repent of her indiscretion when she saw what it did for Robert's mother.

A gleam replaced the sadness in Lady Margaret's eyes—a gleam of honest, genuine amusement. "He

was aye jist—Rōbert," she was saying to herself, and all the exhortations in the world would not have enabled her to throw off her musing fit with its vein of melancholy, as did the little lapse of decorum.

Throughout the evening, while playing the hostess, and keeping up the flow of conversation, which was also anxiously maintained by Sir Robert on his part, Lady Margaret more than once averted a feeling of annoyance, or excused a tactless remark by mentally ejaculating "He was aye jist—Rōbert".

It was because Robert was what he was that he kept informing her of alterations made at the Towers, of old landmarks swept away, of curtailed boundaries, and the sale of outlying lands.

It was because he could not enter into her feelings, and had no conception of their being wounded, that he boldly proclaimed the reformation of divers matters which, according to him, had been mismanaged before his day. To hearken to him Alban Towers had never before been nobly lorded, nor its lands ably guided.

Could he have known that the old woman whose

skirt now and then rustled behind the doorway—for Gibbie presided over every dish that went in and out of the dining-room, and was the most efficient and noiseless of helpers—could the complacent baronet, eating and drinking, and magnifying himself without let or hindrance, have guessed that it was this homely creature's "He was aye jist—Rōbert" which enabled his principal auditor, for whose benefit mainly he discussed, to listen with equanimity, he would have been surprised indeed!

Moreover, Lady Margaret, considering that it was because her son was "aye jist Rōbert" that he had chosen such a person as Florence for his wife, extended her toleration to her daughter-in-law, and so deftly contrived to place her in her most amiable light, and keep her to topics wherein she showed at least inoffensive, that the evening passed without misadventure, and even with some show of sociability.

Lady St. Albans had brought music, and the little piano had been tuned, among Gibbie's other preparations. At night Gibbie was congratulated by her mistress. "It made a pleasant variety. We were

quite gay in the house to-night. I had not recollected that we were to have a musician, and it was a treat to me to hear some of the old songs, which Sir Robert had kindly desired to be brought. She says it is an easy room to sing in, Gibbie."

Anon it was: "They must be dear little children; I have been hearing about them. Perhaps they are to be allowed to visit me next year. You must see their photographs, Gibbie."

"They mun be growin' fine an' big, my leddy." Gibbie kept the talk to the children till she was dismissed for the night.

But she could not control Lady Margaret's thoughts, and it was a long time ere these were sufficiently composed to admit of sleep. "Perhaps I was wrong in coming so very, very far away? It would have been a delight to see the young things in and out, and hear their prattle; they would have called me 'Granny' as the others did. But somehow, at the time, there seemed to be only Robert and his wife, and I felt I could not bear it—*could* not bear it. To be thrown entirely on their hands—to have them ever

between me and the past—to watch the new life flowing on at the old home—it would have been nothing but pain and bitterness of spirit. My own native land, with the friends of my youth, and the ways of my youth, seemed all that was left to brighten the few intervening years—prolonged by my Father's will, and most mercifully cheered and soothed by His goodness,—and I have been happier than I could ever have hoped to be, while waiting for His summons. If only they do not think it unkind!" and stimulated by this last aspiration, Lady Margaret, to Gibbie's surprise, woke the next morning full of plans and projects, as eager as a girl to entertain her visitors, and devote every energy towards making their stay agreeable.

"I don't do much in the way of society, you know, my dears; but the Kelsos will be over this afternoon," —and to her extreme satisfaction another carriage preceded that of the expected guests.

When the colonel and Jenny came, they found the little room quite full; for not only had Mr. and Mrs. Anstruther brought over a distinguished guest, who

was seated by the hostess, and at whom even her daughter-in-law cast deferential glances, but a smart young soldier, brother of the Miss Nancy Muir who has once before appeared in these pages, had by good hap chanced to walk over to the cottage to pay his respects, and recall the days when his schoolboy appetite was wont to be regaled there.

"So lucky!" said Lady Margaret to herself, with the fullest appreciation of the circumstances. "Such a fine, handsome fellow Archy has turned out; and well-mannered too. And instead of finding only the old woman to prose to, he drops in upon a party! Florence will think we have quite a neighbourhood" —and she felt as if anybody might walk in. Neither man nor woman would have surprised her.

"Upon my word, we must come here when we want to see swells." Sir Robert having attended the great personage on a stroll outside, and foreseen reference thereto in many a future conversation, was well-nigh bursting with pride and satisfaction, which he could only just contain till the last departure had taken place. "Colonel Kelso is going to drive me

over to see the famous breed of cattle at Abbeyford," proceeded he. "We are to go on Thursday. I understand we are lunching with the Kelsos themselves to-morrow," addressing his mother. "You are really very good in having arranged so much. Florence will enjoy going to the Kelsos'. I am sure, hum-ha—I only hope you are not overdoing yourself on our account, ma'am?"

"Indeed you look rather flushed," added his wife, with more solicitude in her manner than she had yet shown.

Secretly she had been amazed at Lady Margaret. Lady Margaret certainly had once held, and perhaps could still hold her own in ordinary society, but Florence had grown so accustomed to thinking of her as a rustic recluse, whose ideas on all subjects must now be antiquated and obsolete, that she was astonished in the first instance to find that people of high standing and position, not only considered it worth their while to come long distances themselves for the pleasure of a meeting, but to bring with them one of the most notable men of the day—and secondly, that

Lady Margaret, so far from evincing the slight nervousness or bashfulness on the occasion, was spiri and charming, most evidently enjoying herself, and ease as to the enjoyment of others. At the close a prolonged conversation, she had received a sup compliment with the grace of an empress.

A vulgar mind is impressed by trifles like the it is safe to say that Sir Robert's wife never forgot afternoon's experience.

"I really grew quite alarmed, wondering wher was going to end," cried she, all smiles and affabil "Such a number we seemed in this little room!—A that tall young man blocking up the light! He is the Scots Greys, Robert. You know, Robert, it i very fine regiment——"

"My dear Florence!" Sir Robert laughed. " hardly need to be told that, my dear girl!" though in his heart he was saying, "You betray yc self by the remark," outwardly he passed to ot matters without more than the laugh which silen her for the moment.

"A pretty girl Jenny Kelso is turning out," s

he, not wishing to talk too much of the subject uppermost in his thoughts—(for what was the prettiest girl in the land, compared with an inaccessible celebrity, who could now be quoted as having addressed him "My dear Sir Robert"?). "I suppose she is a bit of an heiress, too?" Presently it was, "We must call upon the Kelsos and Anstruthers when we go to Town. Their civility to *you*," the dutiful son addressed his parent, "calls for anything we can do in return. I begin to think," continued Sir Robert, putting back a chair in its place, and smoothing divers wrinkled edges within reach, for he must work off his excitement somehow—"I fancy you knew what you were about when you elected to settle here, ma'am. A neighbourhood like this does not chop and change as ours do in the South. You have the good old families living on in their own houses from generation to generation. To be sure, we Derringers were unfortunate—but our race was an exception to the rule. We lived on our lands till there were none left to live—that is to say, none that could inherit."

Lady Margaret looked at him sadly, but he saw

nothing. How could he be expected to see that the kindred who had died before he could remember were still the father and brothers of her youth, and to her vision as clearly visible and audible as the dead of later years?

"So that you have the best of everything there is to have in the way of society; and if you can't go to them, they come to you—which is being at the best end of the stick," he concluded, still radiant from reflected glory.

"I have certainly good neighbours," said Lady Margaret, calmly.

But she told Gibbie all about it afterwards, with a good deal of quiet elation.

"He was the little stout gentleman in grey. You saw Sir Robert showing him about." (Well did she know Gibbie would be peeping from a window.) "Even Colonel Kelso was gratified to meet him, for the Anstruthers are not taking him to Lochmadden. He is only here for this one day, and they chose to bring him to *me*," said Lady Margaret, gaily. "What

do you think of that, Mrs. Gibson? The little cottage was very highly honoured this afternoon."

"'Deed an' it was, yer leddyship. We was tellin' lk ither that a' the country-side was here the day."

"Gibbie does not quite understand," said Lady Margaret, to herself. But for herself she was quite aware that the whole of the week, which had opened with so dubious a forecast, was tinted by the rays cast by the fortunate incident. Sir Robert was by many degrees more deferential, and his wife more assiduous than they would otherwise have been.

There were no attempts to put her on the shelf, no manifestations of surprise at her interest in current topics and knowledge of current affairs—such as had secretly disturbed and a little affronted her at the first. She was no longer supposed to be living entirely out of the world.

Lady St. Albans grew more talkative and communicative. From being languidly interested on Lady Margaret's account alone, in Colonel Kelso and his daughter, she discussed them and their concerns with genuine avidity; while so great was her desire to pro-

secute her acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Anstruther, to whose house there had been no previous idea of going, that a fly had to be hired and an expedition made, not a little to the secret diversion of our old friend.

"You led me to think she was surrounded by a set of low people, Robert," cried Florence when alone. "I supposed we were to come and rescue her, and keep her from forgetting they were not the people she ought to associate with."

"'Pon my word, I thought so myself," said he.

"Even the old clergyman and his wife are all right."

"A very decent old couple."

"Then what in the world, my dear, did you mean? You came back in November, making quite a fuss. You fired off such a tirade about old age getting betwaddled, and I don't know what all, that I expected to find your mother sitting in her chair all day with her knitting needles, letting them do as they chose with her property, and taking no notice of anything——"

"My dear Florence, I can only say that I am as much nonplussed as you. I certainly did think my mother older and feebler when I saw her last than I do now. It was bad weather, and she did not leave the house; and then—ha! I have it!" suddenly. "By George, I had quite forgotten 'A. P.'."

"And pray who may 'A. P.' be?"

He told her the story.

"And that was all?" quoth she, coldly. "You saw a cartload of poor people——"

"They were not 'poor people'."

"At anyrate, you only know that they came to see her, and went away because you were there—and that one of them left a grateful card."

"Humph! It was a *very* grateful card."

He was not, however, anxious to press the case, being himself disposed to think he had made too much of it. "A. P.," whoever he might be, obviously could not have pillaged to any great extent. Lady Margaret still kept up a suitable establishment, and brisk intercourse with friends of her own rank; also she was still perfectly qualified to manage her own

affairs, and the advice and guidance which he had meditated tendering, was plainly superfluous. He had only the dutiful anxiety of a son to fall back upon.

And since the whole week had passed without any diminution of his wife's good spirits, and could be looked back upon by her with more complacency than had ever fallen to the lot of a visit to Lady Margaret before, she would not mar the effect by irritating insinuations. Her husband must learn to forget that dreadful *"you"* which had stung her to the quick when she was contrasted with Lady Margaret. As for her comparison of Lady Margaret's cottage to one of the lodges at Alban Towers, she could only be devoutly thankful that no one but Robert had heard it.

All wound up with thus: the children should certainly pay their grandmother a visit in the summer—all hesitation on that subject was at an end.

Sad to tell, however, the visit never came off—although it is due to Lady St. Albans to say this was through no fault of hers.

It was a childish complaint which broke out at

the Towers, and put an end to the Scotch expedition, which was, however, understood to be merely deferred. "They shall certainly go next year," their mother wrote: and Lady Margaret, albeit disappointed, said also confidently and cheerily "next year".

CHAPTER XII.

THE LONDON VISIT AND ITS RESULT.

An uneventful summer and winter passed; neighbours went and came, and Lady Margaret pursued the quiet tenor of her life at the cottage among the sandhills.

She had hoped that April would as usual see her especial friends re-installed at Lochmadden House, but to her disappointment she received a letter from Colonel Kelso, saying that Jenny was to be presented at Court, and have a few weeks of the London season afterwards.

Lady Margaret would not grumble; she had herself advocated something of the kind, forgetful or unmindful of the deprivation to herself which must ensue; and she now resolutely repressed a sigh.

She had noted in Jenny a tendency, slight but perceptible to the experienced eye, towards that self-

importance which is the bane of country-bred young ladies of position. Jenny, wherever she visited among the few houses which formed her own neighbourhood, must be first in consequence—and she rarely went beyond it. She had learnt to think a little too highly of herself, not as herself, but as Colonel Kelso's daughter.

"If you have an opportunity of taking Jenny about a little more—letting her see the world, and find it does not all run in one groove—would it not be well to embrace it, Charles?"

"You find my little girl—ah—provincial, Lady Margaret?"

"I do not see how anyone can help being provincial who is never taken out of the provinces. We all need to rub shoulders with men and women where they exhibit themselves in more plentiful variety—where nations congregate. It does not do to begin life as I am ending it. Jenny is charming, natural, frank, unsophisticated. We all love her, and every girl she knows adores her. She is superior to them, and they acknowledge it. Let her go where she is not

superior; let her find her own level. Besides which, Charles, *your* daughter must not be rustic in her manners any more than in her mind. Delightful as her simplicity is now, in a few years we shall look for the polished address, the graceful knowledge of what is everyone's due, the adroitness at smoothing over an awkward moment—all the quickness of perception and promptness in action which marks the accomplished gentlewoman." Lady Margaret paused for an instant, then, "And which makes Colonel Kelso the accomplished gentleman," added she, smiling.

That very night Colonel Kelso decided on his course of action.

"Do not say anything to *her*," he however confided to his daughter, "it would make her winter long if she knew not to expect us till June; and it will be time enough to tell her that her advice has been followed, and you are to be shaken up a bit among the fine folks of London, when we are established there."

"I don't quite know what we are going for," protested Jenny, only half-pleased with the idea. "We

shan't know many people in London, and I don't see what good it is going to do us."

"Lady Margaret thinks you rustic," said he with a little comical twist of his mouth. "That's the fact, make what you can of it."

He had expected an outcry, but none came. Then he saw that he himself had inculcated too deep a reverence for Lady Margaret's opinion to permit of her censure being lightly heard or protested against.

Jenny had merely blushed scarlet. Rustic? She would sooner have been called anything else upon earth by other lips. Not a single word against the proposed extension of their absence did her father hear from her thenceforth.

And at last June came, and Lady Margaret had no longer to pay her own penalty for having had her word in season followed.

"So, so? All very fine, my dear. You really *had* to stay another week? And dear Lochmadden, that looks so beautiful in the month of May, could not tempt you away from the vast, roaring, seething

metropolis? Oh, Jenny, Jenny! I thought how it would be! I know what it is like—the glamour of it—the gloss and glitter of it."

"But, dear Lady Margaret, it was you who put it into papa's head——"

"So I did, child; so I did. And sometimes I have wondered since whether I might not as well have held my tongue. But ignorance is not innocence, Jenny. There is such a thing as being in the world and not of it; and it seemed to me my little girl ran more danger from rustling in state in her own little comfortable circle down here, than from finding out the sharp corners of the world. Dear girl, you have been brought up in the fear of God, and to go abroad well armed in *that* armour is better for every human being than to shrink from every untoward influence."

"Yes, Lady Margaret," said Jenny, respectfully. She was not listening, however; for once her old friend's wisdom had failed to hit the mark.

To tell the truth, Lady Margaret's young visitor was brooding over something as to which she could not make up her mind whether Lady Margaret should

be told or not. In some ways the London experiment had been a failure; it had been robbed of its value from the point of view adopted by its special advocate, through an unforeseen circumstance. Jenny's mind and manners had not expanded beneath a flood of new experiences, joyful and painful by turns: her eyes had not been opened to perceive that however great a personage Miss Kelso of Lochmadden might be in her own neighbourhood, even in her own county, elsewhere she was a mere unit amongst others whose claims equalled or excelled her own; she had not felt alternately stimulated and crushed, enlightened and humbled;—in a word, to all appearance she was the same Jenny as when she went; and now that the first joyfulness of reunion had effervesced, seemed even a little, a very little less attentive and demonstrative than of yore.

When she was gone, and not till then, Lady Margaret found this out: for a short time she felt puzzled and disappointed; then a ray of light dawned upon her vision. "Oho?" said she to herself.

But she would not force anyone's confidence; if

she were not to be told anything, she would not appear to suspect anything; if Colonel Kelso chose to be as reticent as his daughter concerning the London episode, she would not seek to penetrate his reserve; and when it was only too palpable that things were not as smooth between the two as of old—when the colonel would be short with Jenny, and Jenny flushed and sullen in response—Lady Margaret would calmly talk on, looking neither at one nor the other, to all appearance absolutely unconscious of allusions or double-meanings which were not for her.

But at length came the day and the hour anticipated.

"Lady Margaret?"

"Jenny?"

"You were once a girl like me, and if you don't mind, if you won't think it a liberty and all that, I do so want to talk to you as if you were a girl still."

"I *am* a girl still, in the way you mean," Lady Margaret smiled with quick apprehension. "I have been waiting for this, Jenny; and I am just dying to

hear all about it. You came over to-day on purpose; I thought you would, one of these days. Now begin at the very beginning. Who is he? Where did you first meet him? And——"

"Lady Margaret!" Jenny, who was sitting on a stool by the fire with her arm across Lady Margaret's lap, and her cheek resting on her old friend's knee, looked up in amazement.

"And what has your father against him?" proceeded the latter, coolly.

"He—has papa been telling you? And," indignantly, "he promised me he wouldn't."

Lady Margaret shook her head. "Not a word, any more than you. You have been a couple of most secretive people. So unkind too, when you must have known I was longing to hear;" and she shook her head with a plaintiveness that would have melted stone.

"But whatever made you guess?" Jenny hitched the stool nearer, and both arms went out across the knee.

"We girls guess all these things." Lady Mar-

garet pulled a lock of hair slily. "Get on, Jenny. Never mind what little feathers showed which way the wind blew. They were feathers no one else saw, I daresay. At anyrate no one told me——"

"Oh, no one could, except papa. He made me promise not to tell the other girls, if *he* said nothing to *you*. He wanted me to speak to you myself—but I was afraid. You see I believe papa thinks you would take his part—and—and——"

"And Jenny does not feel quite sure that I won't?"

"Still I want to tell you, Lady Margaret."

"Go on; what's his name?" said Lady Margaret. She made no protestations; she did not even call Jenny "my dear"; she simply looked all impatience for the love-tale. Could there be a more delightful auditor?

"His name? But hadn't I better tell you where we first met? It was at Lady Barcombe's Easter party. Barcombe Abbey is such a lovely place; and we went there for Easter; and you know what an Easter it was, like midsummer. As Lady Barcombe

was to present me directly after, she said I had better come down and get to know the other girl she was taking, her niece; and she would make up a nice party for us both, of the people we were likely to meet during the season. She was awfully kind; and had a lot of men she thought would do for partners and be useful—and—and——"

"Now for the name, Jenny."

"He—Eustace Dagnam—was not there when we arrived; he came afterwards. He is Lady Barcombe's cousin, and she laughed about him before he came, and warned us he was quite impecunious, and that sailors were always falling in love."

"Sailors! Eustace Dagnam? I knew a Eustace Dagnam once, a naval lieutenant——"

"His father's name is George——"

"It would not be his father, but his grandfather," Lady Margaret smiled gently; "if my Eustace turns out to have been any relation of yours. He was older than I—some years older. He came to Derringer—let me see—when Nigel came back from the Mediterranean, he brought this fine handsome Lieutenant

Dagnam with him. I was only seventeen, and I thought —possibly what you think now, Jenny."

"Were you? Did you?——"

"Oh, no; it never went very far; still, it would be curious if—have your Dagnams anything to do with Hampshire?"

"Why, of course; they live there now, the older branch of the family does, at least. Oh, that is strange; you must tell papa; perhaps if you were to tell papa——"

"Ah, but I have not heard papa's side of the question."

"Oh, Lady Margaret, he has nothing against Eustace—nothing. He said himself that he was a fine fellow; and until he found that we were—were beginning to—to——"

"I know."

"It is only that he is so poor, and all his people are poor. His father is only a third son, and Eustace is his third son. And there are such a lot of them. And of course they have to live in a very small way —and can't afford things—and the boys have to be

educated at Bedford, because it is a cheap school—and—and—papa says the whole thing is *squalid*," suddenly the torrent froze up, and down went the brown head upon Lady Margaret's knee.

For a few minutes Lady Margaret stroked it, saying nothing.

"Do say what you think, Lady Margaret," a smothered voice uprose presently. "Just what you think."

"Then, Jenny, I think," slowly, "that if the man were worth it, I should not care even though his surroundings were 'squalid'."

"Do you—oh!"

"Mind, 'if the man were worth it'," repeated Lady Margaret, with emphasis.

"He is worth it; he is indeed," and Jenny poured forth anew; and anew there fell a silence between them.

"I see you think papa has something on his side," murmured the girl, at last.

"A good deal on his side. For one thing, how came so young a man——"

"Not so young. He is nearly thirty."

Lady Margaret smiled. How strange it sounded! Fifty years behind her, and "not so young!" "At any-rate, only a second-lieutenant, and with nothing but his pay. I think, Jenny, it was hardly right or fair in him to come forward for your hand."

"He did not do that—he did not indeed. It was only because he was going away—to join the Chinese fleet, he is there now—and it was our last evening, and we were at a great London crush; Lady Barcombe had got him the invitation—she always did—oh, I see you think she should not? But she was so kind——"

"To you, perhaps, and to him. I can understand Lady Barcombe's view of the subject very well," said Lady Margaret, straightening her back, "and your father has a good right to be annoyed with her, as you say he is. A penniless relation and a rich only daughter—but we need not discuss that. It is cruel to this poor little girl. Did your father—does he think —Jenny, answer me truly—I *may* be able to help you, and I will if I *can*—does he consider Eustace Dagnam himself disinterested?"

"Disinterested!"

"No need to flare up, little firebrand. It is not what *you* think, but what your father does.

"He says," reluctantly, "that such a thing ought never to have been thought of—that Eustace should not have allowed himself to fall in love——"

"Still he calls it falling in love?"

"Yes—yes. Ask him yourself, Lady Margaret. And when we told him about *that* evening, he was quite kind, and held out his hand to Eustace and said, 'I don't blame you, my poor fellow, for betraying yourself in an unguarded moment'—you see all Eustace wanted was for me to know that he really cared, not to suppose he had been flirting (because something happened which led to his being afraid I might think that),—and he never asked me if *I* cared—never once;—and he was going away without knowing——"

"But he didn't?"

Jenny smiled back.

"Well now, I think I understand the case," said Lady Margaret at length, the above having been repeated and discussed with variations *ad libitum*,

"and we will see what can be done. He is off for two years——"

"Two whole years!" A sigh.

"Jenny—honestly—do you think he and you will stand the test of two years' waiting?"

"Lady Margaret——" a long pause. "Yes," said Jenny simply.

It was the colonel's turn next.

"I am very glad she has confided in you, my dear friend. And though I daresay it was not quite —one can't expect a hot-headed lassie to put the matter quite straight—still, I think, all things considered, Jenny has not done amiss. I blame Lady Barcombe——"

"So do I—in a measure. She ought at least to have ascertained that you would not be antagonistic. The thing is done, however; and now I understand from you both that were all else equal, you would have no objection to the young man for Jenny's husband?"

"But things are not equal. And blame me if you will, Lady Margaret, I look higher for my daughter

than a penniless sea-captain—say he ever gets to be a captain."

"Pride, Charles."

"Pride, if you will. It is the truth. A man may be all a parent could wish, but if he cannot offer a suitable home to his wife—why, she would be a sort of widow half the time, and perhaps a dozen children to bring up all by herself——"

"At Lochmadden House."

"That's the idea? I don't say it has not something to recommend it. Still——" and he made a restive movement.

"For Jenny's *dignity* it would perhaps be more desirable that she should have a house of her own where her father could visit her; for her *happiness*—I don't know. For her father's happiness——"

"My happiness is not to be considered. I trust I am not selfish."

After a time it was: "I should like to hear unreservedly how you look upon the affair. I think I may say I will be guided by you. I am sick of going on as we do, with this constant cloud between us.

If you can give me back my little Jenny, the Jenny you found fault with before this unlucky expedition——"

"Ah, Charles," Lady Margaret shook her head, gently. "Many and many a father has sighed that sigh before you. It is a bitter moment when we first discover that the parent's love no longer suffices. We cry, 'Give me back the child'—but the child no longer exists. What then? You would not have the bud never blossom? You would not have it remain 'bound,' gradually to wither and fade, without ever expanding in maturity? Be brave, dear friend, and accept the Divine order of things. *You* loved, *I* loved; must Jenny only go without the crowning glory of life in man or woman?"

When Colonel Kelso left, he felt as though his heart were as very wax. "I was afraid of her all along," he muttered. "The worst of it is, she is so reasonable; sees so clearly all there is against it; does not pretend it is a good match, or what I might have looked for; and yet,—anyhow, there is two years' grace," he consoled himself. "Even Lady Meg thinks they ought to wait two years."

. . . . . .

But the two years flew by, and one fine morning there was an early visitor at the cottage—one not wholly unexpected neither. For Jenny's dear, kind, wonderful Lady Margaret, who had brought round papa as no one else in the world could have done, had been kept duly informed of certain communications which could only have one result; so now her, "Oh, Lady Margaret, he's coming!" needed no interpretation.

"To-night," continued Jenny, with starry eyes. "Only think! This very night! He landed this morning, and had just time to send a telegram before the train started. Would—would you like to see the telegram?" She was blushing, panting, glowing all over; but it was the old hand, not the young, which trembled as the pink envelope passed between them.

Jenny saw. "I startled you; I am so sorry."

"Sorry? Sorry for *anything* when you have this?" A little tremulous cry, then a break in the voice. "Some day, my child—some day, perhaps, in

the far, far future, you will look on this bit of paper as I do—on one of its kind." A long breath, Lady Margaret's eyes upon the telegram, seeing something else than it meanwhile.

Then Jenny. "I know I shall. I do now. That is, I mean—I mean—oh, Lady Margaret, *you* know, *you* understand. I have been taking it out, ever since it came—to look, to see, to be sure of the exactest moment it was sent, and was received, and all. And I feel just as if he had written it himself with his own hand; I keep forgetting that it is only the stupid girl at our telegraph-office who sends up all the stupid telegrams ——"

"Who had the audacity to meddle with this one? But bear up, Jenny; at anyrate, the life, the soul, the very being in the words is 'his,' and 'he' will be here to-night!" Again the old voice faltered and fell. "To-night," whispered Lady Margaret, as though to herself; and Jenny, looking at her, saw that her hands were clasped, and that before the dim eyes was spread a vision—a "To-night" of years and years ago.

CHAPTER XIII.

"A MERE NOTHING—BUT NO VISITORS."

"I SUPPOSE we all go over to the cottage this afternoon?" said Colonel Kelso, jovially.

He was now able to be jovial; he had swallowed his pill, and found that, like many another of its kind, if bitter in the mouth it sat easily upon the stomach. Eustace Dagnam might be a poor match for a pretty heiress, but if looks and words were to be trusted, he would prove a rarely good husband for a much-beloved daughter. He had a straight eye, an honest brow, and a right pleasant voice and smile. Furthermore, he came of a good stock, and had already made his mark in his profession. Long ago the colonel had regretted using a certain opprobrious term in connection with the young man's immediate surroundings, and now it needed only Dagnam's earnest and instant acquiescence in his

view of adopting a son in place of losing a daughter, to enable him to forget comfortably all that it was not desirable to remember.

Accordingly he was eager to let Lady Margaret see how well he was behaving, and made the proposition above recorded with all the confidence in the world.

But "Oh!" said Jenny, looking a little blank. For it was the day after her gallant sailor's arrival, and another way of spending it had been planned. Let lovers sympathise.

"*Not?*" exclaimed her father—(fathers are dull beings)—"why, I thought—I made sure you would wish to go. She will certainly be expecting us; and considering all things," his eye pointing a meaning sufficiently audible to the ear, "considering what Lady Margaret——"

"Oh, yes, papa—yes." Jenny, to tell the truth, had somewhat slurred over the beneficent intervention of her old friend, and let it appear (but artlessly and with intentions all for the best) that her dear papa had of his own unaided self come to see things in a

different light, when calmly reviewing what had transpired in the fevered atmosphere of London, within the peaceful seclusion of his Scottish home.

Without in her own heart detracting one iota from the value of Lady Margaret as a powerful, almost omnipotent ally, she had—well, well, Lady Margaret would only have laughed had she known, and very likely said that Jenny was right, and that all she had done was to make Charles Kelso think a little faster than he would have thought by himself.

There was but one conclusion to which he could have come, with or without her.

Not so, however, thought the colonel; he was now feeling somewhat disturbed, owning a debt of gratitude which must be paid off; and accordingly he looked askance at a newcomer to whom suspicion might attach—but a second glance dispelled the suspicion.

No, there was no collusion; no passing of glances between Eustace Dagnam's blue eyes and other eyes —while as for the sailor's "I am ready, sir, to *go* wherever you wish, and *do* whatever you wish," it sounded as if, reflected Colonel Kelso afterwards, "I

only needed to order him to take a header from the topmost point of the mast, to see him flash past!"

What paternally-knit brow could fail to smoothe beneath such prompt devotion? Our old colonel had found—and possibly at that moment recognised the discovery—the very son-in-law for whom his soul craved.

"All right, then," said he, good-humouredly. "Jenny, you are an ungrateful puss; and I hope someone else will make you behave better than I can;" but someone else, looking very respectfully and a shade timidly upon the beetling brows and square-cut chin of the resolute old martinet, inwardly decided that the task which had baffled him was likely to prove too tough for any other man. (Miss Jenny meanwhile sitting demurely by, keeps her own counsel, and is privately very sure that she can manage the two of them with one hand—not to say its little finger.)

We thus see that things were in a fair way to work smoothly at Lochmadden House, and with minds at rest can follow the little party trotting over hill and dale that same afternoon to pay their visit of ceremony at Lady Margaret's cottage.

"He is certainly a fine-looking fellow," quoth the colonel to himself, as he took a peep over his shoulder every now and then, pointing out this and that to his guest; "uncommonly well those rough tweeds become him too! A fine healthy animal, with a skin like sunburnt satin! 'Pon my word, 'tis a comfort nowadays to be able to present a future son-in-law without having to back him up with an apology. 'Not much to look at, but so many hundred thousands in railways'—or, 'Hasn't an "H," but runs a mine'—that's the sort of thing Vernon and Markham had to go about saying. Anyway I am spared *that.* I say, 'Here he is; look at him; speak to him; judge for yourselves'. If he can't plank down the dibs, that's my affair. Lady Meg will simply lose her head altogether," he concluded with an extra complacent flick of the whip, as the cobs turned down the familiar incline, and were brought up in style at Lady Margaret's door.

No one was about, a sure token to Colonel Kelso's mind that he had been right in surmising the visit was not unlooked for. "Of course she'd expect us,"

he muttered to himself, pleased with his own perspicuity; wherefore, instead of casting his eyes hither and thither in quest of any old *spae-wife* apparition, he sat upright and square upon the box-seat, having drawn up with an impressive flourish, and inwardly calculated that probably his old friend—elaborately prepared by Gibbie—was at the same moment scanning at her leisure Eustace Dagnam's handsome profile, if she were seated as was her wont, in her own armchair commanding the window.

"Let her have a good look at him before he goes in!" chuckled the colonel. "He'll bear looking at. And an honest face is none the worse for being seen unawares. Let her look, say I. Ho, Katie, is Lady Margaret—Ha, Mrs. Gibson!"—(Gibbie was already in the doorway)—"are we to—*what's the matter?*" demanded the speaker with a sudden lifting of the voice. "Eh? What d'ye say? Lady Margaret? Is anything the matter with Lady Margaret?"

"No jist the maitter, cornell. Her leddyship—she was expeckin' ye ower——"

"Of course. I told Miss Jenny so. I knew she would expect us."

"An' mickle she's talked aboot it——"

"Ay, ay. Here we are, you see."

"An' sair she focht wi' me to get doonstairs——"

"She's not downstairs then?"

"No jist doonstairs. But ye'll step in, Miss Jenny? Though 'deed the doctor did sae nae veesitors——"

The poor old woman—an agony was written on ier brow! To have to say such a thing! And to uch visitors! And before him, the young gentleman —*the* young gentleman!—brought over in state!— rought, as befitting, on the very first day after his rrival! It was terrible; it was unbearable!

There she stood with shaking knees, and trembling ıands smoothing down the fronts of her black silk; ınd could she have said anything else, invented any ie, however transparent, she would have done so,— ıut none would have served her purpose, and all per- eived how matters stood.

Had Lady Margaret been really ill, Gibbie told ierself, she would not have heeded how she barred

the door, nor upon whom—but who talked of illness? Dr. M'Ewan pooh-poohed the idea of such a thing.

He had been summoned that morning somewhat hurriedly—(Gibbie had swallowed in her throat as she gave Donald the order, and Mysie and Katie had been rated for idle, useless hussies, because they listened and looked at one another as she did so)—but the doctor, when he came, made light of their anxiety.

It was a mere nothing at which they had taken fright. Their mistress had been a little over-excited or over-heated; he would send over something to quiet her down. Meantime bed, and no visitors.

And this to happen on what should have been a great day in Lady Margaret's life!

Gibbie in due time had been taken into confidence regarding Miss Jenny's affairs (she had had her own suspicions long before), and proud she was of all the goings and comings, the long conferences held separately with father and daughter, the messengers with despatches which had to be replied to were the answer never so long in being ready. All

the new importance which had supervened upon the old deference was thirstily absorbed, and its dew made her well-worn countenance glisten at the bare mention of Lochmadden House.

Then when all had been formally announced, how ably had she wielded the new weapon that was to keep the wilful Leddy Marget from outbreaks—the, "Ye maun keep weel for Miss Jenny's weddin'," which actually did have more restraining influence than any other reminder of its kind ever had before.

Many a night did Gibbie lie awake, planning how her mistress was to be set out for the occasion; how she was to be spared fatigue; withdrawn from lesser moments; produced in triumph at the crowning ones. It was understood that once the young lieutenant were returned from foreign service, there would be no delay in the marriage taking place, since the colonel himself had declared the young people ought to get all the good of each other they could ere the next inevitable separation. The summer then would hardly be over ere the great event came off; and that would suit

Lady Margaret finely, reflected Lady Margaret's faithful custodian.

That her ladyship would be a central figure on the occasion did not admit of doubt; and Gibbie's heart swelled with pride and pleasure when informed that she and her mistress were to be located in the house, with the very best rooms assigned to them, several days before the other guests should arrive.

"For you see you are going to be my mother;" Jenny had fondled her old friend's hand.

It was too bad of Jenny to want to go off alone with her Eustace, instead of bringing him straight to the cottage at a subsequent period—but we have all been young once; and Gibbie never knew; and Jenny herself forgot, and would have been indignant had she ever been reminded of the momentary remissness.

At the commencement of this blissful period, Gibbie had, however, had a worry. She durst not broach the subject of a new dress and bonnet, not feeling quite sure how Lady Margaret would take it. Lady Margaret had spent a good deal of late; the purchase of Mr. Proudfoot's house had somewhat crippled her

resources for the time, and there had been later expenses besides; how if her ladyship were now to say she could not afford finery? On the one subject of her worldly affairs she was reticent.

And it seemed to Gibbie that Lady Margaret had given no thought to the matter—what was to be done? In sheer desperation she essayed a hint at last; and then, oh wonderful! found that her apparently negligent ladyship had never contemplated anything less than the orthodox splendour due to so august an occasion.

"Of course I shall pay the bride that compliment," said Lady Margaret, placidly. "Directly the day is fixed, Gibbie, which will be as soon as the young man arrives—and you know he is expected to-night —we must send for patterns. I wish I could have employed my own old dressmaker, for I fear good little Miss Macalister will hardly put me in the latest fashion."

("The latest fashion!" Gibbie's breath grew short, and her eyes turned up in a sort of ecstasy.)

"But I hardly think I could go to London myself, nor send so far for a fitter to come down," proceeded

Lady Margaret, considering the point, "so I must be content, and you, Mrs. Gibson, must be content with a good, rich silk, and let Miss Macalister do her best."

"An' 'deed she mak's for mony o' them roon'," cried Gibbie, eagerly; "an' wi' a weddin' to mak' for, she'll gang to Glasgow or maybe to E'nburgh; an' yer leddyship aye likes them plain——"

But Lady Margaret turned upon her sharply. "Plain? Not at all. Not on this occasion. Certainly not plain. Miss Macalister must not start with *that* idea. The colonel would think it a very poor return for all his friendship if he had to introduce a shabby old creature at the wedding of his only daughter; and Jenny will have the bridegroom's relations to think of too. When the feelings of those we love are in question, we ought to grudge neither trouble nor money on our appearance."

("Neither trouble nor money!" Gibbie lifted up her eyes anew, in thanksgiving too deep for words.)

"So pray let there be no *plainness* this time," proceeded Lady Margaret, with a little testy recollection of the old tussle over the low-necked dress. "I

should wish to be dressed as if it were for the marriage of one of my own daughters—understand, one of my own daughters. You know how *that* ought to be, Gibbie—how it was in times past. Let me look like that again—as like as *can* be," she corrected herself, with a momentary sigh. Then more briskly, "Think over what I shall want, and let us send out our orders in good time!" It was long since any command had sounded so musical in Gibbie's ears.

And presently there had been a gentle recall as the old servant was leaving the room. "You must have a new gown too, Gibbie; we will send for it with mine."

This had happened the night before, and Gibbie had scarce closed an eye thereafter for pondering and planning. All seemed now so near. Immediately would Lochmadden House be plunged into the bustle of preparation, of which many an echo would find its way to Lady Margaret's cottage; the colonel, whose devotion to his old friend seemed ever on the increase, would look in perpetually with questions and suggestions; Miss Jenny would come to tell of her presents

and trousseau; even the minister would take the opinion of his venerated parishioner anent the marriage service. And the very next day would see all this joyous din beginning!

Alas! It saw the doctor's gig at the door.

"But it is a mere nothing, I assure you, Mrs. Gibson. No cause for alarm; none whatever. I'll take care of 'Leddy Marget'. Why, I don't know what all the folks of the countryside would say to me if—quite so. Long distant may that day be, mistress! Now, all you have to do is to keep her ladyship where she is—in bed; give her my medicines directly they arrive (Donald can fetch them as soon as you please; I am going straight home, and will have them ready by the time he gets there)—and I'll look in—ahem! —to-night, and see how she's getting on. But mind," —quickly—"no talking—no visitors. You said something about visitors?"

"Cornell and Miss Kelso will likely be ower, sir."

"They must not be admitted, then. You can tell them as much or as little as you please; but I must be obeyed —mind you, obeyed—on this point." And with a

peremptoriness somewhat at variance with his easy disposal of the case, the worthy medico mounted his gig and departed.

Gibbie looked after him with a set face. At another time she would have seen clearly through now what simply loomed an awful haze. But to see through it meant—she hastily shut her eyes.

The colonel, however, spoke as unconcernedly as Dr. M'Ewan had done. "Oh, dear me, this is a disappointment!" he cried. "And your lady is never unwell, is she? To be tripped up to-day of all days in the year! But there are many kinds of ailments flying about, and one seems bound to catch some of them. I had a little attack myself lately—was laid up for several days. Mind you tell your mistress we can't spare her above a day or two. She must hurry and get well; for here is Miss Jenny——"

"And dear Lady Margaret was looking so well yesterday," struck in Jenny's fresh piping voice—Jenny was all smiling and rosy. ("'Deed she luikit like a bit flure i' the sun!" reported Gibbie, afterwards.)

"Do give her my fondest love and say, please"—and then she too laughed and looked round.

"Ay, to be sure; say—you know what, Mrs. Gibson;" again it was the father's turn. "This is Mr. Dagnam," the sailor jumped down and held out his hand on the instant; "you tell Lady Margaret we brought Mr. Dagnam, to introduce him; but she will have plenty of opportunities of making his acquaintance presently. So there is no need to bother with too many messages. Look, Dagnam, isn't that a fine view?" proceeded the colonel, pointing with his whip. "Perhaps you don't care about the sight of the sea as some of us land-lubbers do, but to me it is always a treat to stand at this door. And as for the sunsets!" ("Must give Gibbie time to take stock," reflected he.) Aloud: "Could there be a pleasanter spot? So sheltered; so sunny. If there is a bit of sun going, Lady Margaret catches it. But don't let your mistress out till the wind changes, Mrs. Gibson. Ha—ha!"—genially—"no need to tell *you* that. We all know you are as good as a dozen doctors and nurses rolled into one. Well now, we had better be

going; jump up, Dagnam; and better luck next time." Keeping up his gay tone to the last, the colonel saluted cordially, and turned his horses.

But the next day Gibbie, passing from the kitchen, heard a strange noise at the back-door. She stood still, and her heart gave a stound. At the *back-door!* What did this mean? At the same moment a stealthy figure passed the passage window.

"Whae's yon?" demanded the old woman in a high key. "The cornell? *The cornell!* An' ye lat him gang——" and she was out herself like lightning.

"Oh, thank-you, Mrs. Gibson; no, I don't know that I'll come in; but perhaps I may, for a minute." ("Bother it! I thought I had got off!") "I—I——" stammered Colonel Kelso, confused and undone. "I did not mean to disturb anyone; I thought you would be occupied upstairs—and that one of the maids could just tell me—hum—ha—it occurred to me to look in and ask how she was?"

"Ye didna mean me to ken o't, cornell," significantly. "I understan',—an'—an' thank-ye kindly.

Ye was creepin' aff—but no, sir, ye'll no gang like that a second time frae oor door. Oh, cornell," laying her imploring hand on his arm, "dinna, dinna say me nay. I'll no tell *her;* I'll no let on ye was near the place, if ye'll step in by, and sit ye doon an' let me mak' ye a drap o' tea——"

"Why, of course I will, Mrs. Gibson; and to tell the truth, I am not sorry to have a rest;—I walked over, not to make a fuss. The young people are off on the tricycles, and there was no need to tell them I was coming. So if you are quite sure that Lady Margaret——" and he looked the rest. Gibbie sighed heavily, and led the way.

When the tea was ready, she brought it in herself. In the interval she had withdrawn to steady as best she might her trembling pulses; but the kettle was on the boil, and she was back in ten minutes. The colonel looked at her, and looked at his cup.

"Ye'll tak' sugar, sir?"

"Sugar? Yes, if you please. But I believe there is some in already. Mrs. Gibson—ahem—the doctor of course—would naturally come twice."

"Oo, ay, sir; nat'rally. Can I saut yer scon', sir? The scon's jist aff the fire."

"Excellent, thank-you—excellent scones. Hum—ha—I'm no great eater—of course a doctor—it is difficult for a doctor to pronounce definitely—they are apt to make the most of things. Do you think yourself—you know Lady Margaret better than he can do ——?"

"Kent her this fower and fowerty year, cornell. Lived wi' her, sairved her, helpit her to lay her bairns i' the grave——" a long shuddering sigh.

The colonel sat and stirred his cup round and round, forgetting to drink.

"She's lyin' doverin'," said Gibbie, at length.

"Is she?"

"Jist doverin'. Neither asleep nor awake; but whiles she looks roon' at me wi' a kind o' lauch, and says, 'Gibbie, I think I'm havin' *dalldrums*'—that's fancies, sir, jist foolish kind o' fancies. An' whiles she starts up, an' speers at me for what is she i' her bed? An' whiles she starts singin'. Wheesht!" suddenly pausing to listen as a low crooning was heard

overhead. Gibbie nodded. "Ay, it's her. She's singing noo." Another pause. "She garred me sing wi' her i' the nicht," whispered the old woman, under her breath. "No that I can, but she wad ha'e me. 'The Heavenly Temple stan's'—yon's her favourite. Ower an' ower she sings the tae verse."

"'Where high the Heavenly Temple stands?'" said the colonel.

"'The Hoose o' God no made wi' han's,'" responded Gibbie.

"'A Great High Priest our nature bears,'" said the colonel.

"'The Guardian o' mankin' appears,'" said Gibbie.

Between them they made out the verse, and stopped with solemn, awe-stricken countenances.

"Maybe I wad jist gang up a meenut?" suggested the old servant, presently. Colonel Kelso motioned a mute assent.

Left by himself he turned slowly round, and gazed as he had often done before from the little window.

A glorious summer day was reigning over land and sea. Scarce a breath stirred the glassy ocean; the stretch of shining sand—Lady Margaret's favoured haunt—lay bathed in a golden glow.

"She'll never tread there again," thought he.

He had not stirred when the door reopened. Even then he only raised his head, and looked with questioning eyes.

"Cornell," the old woman covered her mouth with her hand—the colonel still looked silently, cornell—*it'll no be lang.*"

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE KING HAS CALLED ME TO HIS SIDE TO-NIGHT."

TOWARDS the close of the week, however, Lady Margaret, to the surprise of everybody, showed signs of rallying. Her vigorous constitution re-asserted itself; her doctor was a sensible man; and her nurse to the manner born.

"We shall have her going about as well as ever!" cried one and another. "She will come to my wedding yet!" confidently affirmed Joanna Kelso.

Only Gibbie, smiling upon everybody and offering no disclaimer to any prognostication, never originated a remark.

Lady Margaret laughed at Gibbie; begged to know how long Dame Jailor intended to keep her boxed up within four walls when the days were so fine without?—declared that she was being pampered and petted with delicacies, until it was no wonder

She could not eat good wholesome food, but required wine to wash it down.

She would not hear of Sir Robert's being sent for. He would be coming presently of his own accord, she said. August was close at hand; and he always came in August.

But she grew impatient of seeing nobody, and hearing nothing of other people's concerns; and at length, as the improvement was steady and maintained, it was obvious that the rigid seclusion of the sick-room was literally fretting its occupant. "I cannot go on for ever thinking about myself," cried she, when it was suggested that a new departure might be productive of ill-results. "Suppose I do not sleep so well, or eat so well, or whatever it is you are afraid of? It is no such very great matter. I am not the centre of the universe. I shall just tell the doctor I mean to get up," concluded she, defiantly.

"Get up, by all means," said the doctor, when she did so.

To Gibbie's mind it was almost a resurrection, and though the little cottage was full of jubilation,

nobody said much about it to Mrs. Gibson on the day her ladyship first walked downstairs.

"But oh, how delightful it is to see you again, Lady Margaret!"

They were all there, the three who had been perforce excluded on the disastrous day we know of, and Lady Margaret, in brocade and ruffles, was seated in their midst.

There had been a motion on Colonel Kelso's part to dispense with this second visit of state, or at any-rate to deprive it of the formal splendour of the first. "The young people can come by themselves, and I look in another day; hey, Mrs. Nurse?" Gibbie was "Mrs. Nurse" at this juncture.

"She wadna like it, sir."

"Let me make my call first then, and they can follow; and I slip away as soon as they appear? So we should not be all in the room together."

"As ye please, sir; but——"

"Wouldn't do, eh?"

"Her leddyship has set her hairt on receivin' the

comp'ny as ye cam' *that day*, cornell; she aye threeps aboot it. Gif ye wad gi'e her satisfaction——"

"Of course we would. Anything in the world we have to give."

"Then, sir, if I may mak' sae bold, come ower as ye cam' then; wi' the horses, an' the carriage; Miss Jenny an' yersel' upo' the box, an' the young gentleman ahint wi' Thamas. An' come as near the time, cornell, if it's no inconvenient, as ye can. It wad be fower o' the clock. An' ye'll kindly excuse my sayin' sae?"

Accordingly the clock had barely struck the hour ere the trampling of hoofs was heard, and Gibbie in a tremor glanced at her mistress. Not a muscle of Lady Margaret's face moved. Composed and erect she sat within her chair, her hands folded, a tranquil air of expectation upon her aged features. Gibbie saw she might be left. "Ye'll be best yer lane, noo?"

"If you please, Gibbie."

Of herself Lady Margaret would scarcely have made the proposition, so tender was she growing of Gibbie's feelings; but to the fine perceptions of the

latter it was enough that the invalid had drawn herself upright, and listened undisturbed to champing horses and a clanging door-bell.

"She'll win through," decided Gibbie, vanishing.

And presently through the doorway, which opened and shut as Katie spread the little board, there came a pleasant, continuous murmur of voices; a little subdued, perhaps; Colonel Kelso's deep bass tones not quite so hilarious as was their wont; Jenny's low laugh rising only at intervals—but still enough to cheer the spirits and allay fears. Whatever happened now, Lady Margaret had had her will, and not broken down in the having it. Gibbie was quite cheerful that afternoon.

And Lady Margaret enjoyed herself immensely; said many bright, amusing, original things; was downright witty once or twice. Eustace Dagnam was charmed with her, charmed with the whole scene; thought he had never seen a certain dear little rosebud cheek look sweeter than when it was laid against the withered cheek of age, and but that he was always prompt to obey the slightest signal, would fain have

ngered longer within the little room, instead of flying ound to order the carriage. Lady Margaret uttered a soft complaint that the party was over so soon,—but Colonel Kelso affected not to hear, and Jenny too was deaf.

"You are in a great hurry to go, Charles."

"How wonderfully your roses bloom this year, Lady Margaret."

On the way home Jenny said with a slight hesitation, "Papa, is Lady Margaret—do you notice anything different about Lady Margaret?" But all the answer she got was a quick look and something very like a groan. She asked no more.

As time moved on, Gibbie often wondered whether it did or did not strike her mistress that nothing was being done about the wedding dress. The wedding itself was often discussed; and now that the ice was broken, visitors from Lochmadden were frequent at the cottage; but they never stayed long at a time, and as they went in or out usually exchanged a smothered word or two with herself, which showed that they might be trusted.

Lady Margaret also resumed the interest she had always taken in the affairs of her humbler neighbours; would have some of her specially-prepared beef-tea sent to one sick person, and a comfortable chair from out the spare bedroom to another. A child that was born was named after her—and she was in a fuss lest the orthodox christening-gift should be forgotten; she kept forgetting it herself, she said.

Then she had a visit from Dr. and Mrs. Makellar, and the minister's voice was heard in prayer, the while Gibbie kept watch outside, lest any intrusive step should approach. (She peeped through the keyhole at the "Amen," to see whether Lady Margaret rose from her kneeling posture in safety, but was standing some distance off, in the porch, when the visitors emerged.)

And of course Archibald Proudfoot found his way over to the cottage, as indeed he had every obligation to do,—but Mrs. Gibson courteously gave him to understand that so rigid were the instructions laid upon her, that with the best will in the world, she

durst not disobey medical authority in so far as to admit him.

"His lauch wad be the deith o' her!" muttered Gibbie, with a grim contraction of her own muscles.

"Oh, poor 'Archibald'!" said Lady Margaret when she heard.

Presently she looked round with a smile. "Gibbie, when my time comes—*you* know—if it is a cold, wet day when they come for me, don't let the minister take the risk; he is frail, and would be sure to catch one of his bad colds. 'Archibald' will do;" and she smiled again, so humorously, but withal so seriously, that Gibbie turned away, scarce knowing whether jest or earnest were intended, but fearing greatly to ask.

It had happily been arranged some time before what Lady Margaret's present to the bride should be, and a week before the auspicious day it arrived—a fine miniature painting of Jenny's father set in brilliants, and adapted to be worn in various ways. Lady Margaret sat with the case in her hand throughout the greater part of the day on which it was to be

presented, and was somewhat exhausted after the exciting scene was over; but she told Gibbie over and over again, always as a fresh piece of news, that Miss Jenny declared she valued such a gift beyond any other that could have been given her.

Lady Margaret often sat thinking, and would sometimes look up with a start, and begin talking of people and things it taxed all Gibbie's powers of memory to recall; but she never seemed at all surprised to find Gibbie in the room with her. "I have just had a letter from India. Mrs. Mandeville will be with us very soon," she announced easily. "She is bringing home her boys; to send them to Eton, you know."

"Yes, my leddy," said Gibbie, dutifully. Alas! the "boys" were grown men with families of their own; and the letter which had "just come," had been received years and years ago!

Anon it was, "Gibbie, the little fellow who used to call for his apple every morning—I forget his name —does he still get it?"

"Aweel, my leddy, ye see——"

"But I said he *was* to get it, Gibbie; I promised him he should. And I gave the order. It is too bad that just because I have been ill——"

Gibbie rose and came to her mistress' side.

"Ye'll mind Robbie is i' a fine place noo. It was yer leddyship whae spoke for him."

"I spoke *to* him once; up in the apple-tree! Ho! Ho! It was a funny place; oh, never mind," hastily, "only something that—that once happened. So Robbie is not here now?"

"I' a place yer leddyship got for him."

"Mind you say I am glad to hear he is keeping it, Gibbie."

Lady Margaret seldom talked about herself. At times a quiet radiance would overspread her features as she sat musing with the open Bible on her knee; while ever and anon murmured syllables escaped, betraying, as through chinks, gleams of the light within; but for the most part her mind, when busy, worked upon the concerns of others; unselfish to the last, she could not even now be wholly absorbed by her own abounding peace and joy.

One day she said to Gibbie, with a soft regret in her tone, "I have *everything*, and I sit and think, Can I do nothing for all of you who have so little?"

"Ye'll remember us when ye come into the Kingdom," said Gibbie, solemnly.

. . . . . .

It was the wedding eve.

Lady Margaret had been unusually well all day; gay too, with something of her old mirthful humour, and for the first time since her illness had reverted to her deprivation in having to forego being present at the marriage ceremony.

"I do believe I could have managed to do it, if we had only got the clothes!" she cried. "I could have had a nice close carriage from Irvine's; and need not have stopped for the reception. It is too late to think of it now."

"Ay, my leddy, ower late."

"I could not appear in an old gown!"

"'Deed, yer leddyship, no. It's no fit."

"So I say. I can see that for myself, Mrs. Gibson.

I'm not *that* blind and doited," and Lady Margaret, looking so like her former self as almost to scare her auditor, gave the latter a little playful push, and continued her lamentation. An hour later she had forgotten all about it.

Towards night, however, the subject revived, and with it a certain restlessness and confusion of ideas.

She was going to a wedding, Lady Margaret said, but whose she could not exactly remember. Was it her own? Had Victor come?

Gibbie moved softly back and forward, saying nothing, keeping her head averted.

"The Wedding Supper of the Lamb!" broke out Lady Margaret on a sudden, uplifting an illumined countenance, as joyfully astonished by a new idea. "'Sh, Gibbie, did you hear? The King has called me to His side to-night! My wedding garment—quick. White as snow; washed in His blood. The garment of His righteousness. Make haste, Gibbie, haste." She rose and hurried towards the door.

"We'll see to't," said Gibbie soothingly, and

drew her upstairs. Would it be possible to get her to bed?

It was done; but half undressed, Lady Margaret paused. "Dear Gibbie," she said, persuasively, "could you leave me for a little? Only for a very little? I should like to look over some old things. I would promise to be good, Gibbie."

Gibbie hesitated.

"Run along, good woman, run along," cried Lady Margaret, imperatively; and Gibbie, with a start, disappeared.

For a moment Lady Margaret stood looking after her, then she softly locked the door, (though not so softly but that Gibbie heard it).

It was, however, a sultry August night, there was no fire in the grate, and the anxious nurse told herself that fears were groundless.

And they were; but ah! it was a strange scene which presently took place within the little dim-lit chamber.

Slipping off the wrapper in which Gibbie had left her, Lady Margaret knelt down beside a huge,

chintz-covered ottoman, unlocked it, and lifted the lid. It was full to the brim of gorgeous stuffs, with here and there a finely-wrought infant's robe. In one corner was a man's waistcoat of white satin, richly embroidered.

It was not, however, over these that the kneeling figure now hung. Hastily burrowing beneath, and working fast, as one who knows that time is scanty, she pulled out what at first seemed to be a child's frock, but a frock of the rarest material and finest texture. Its soft folds shone in the pale light; the satin ribbon of the bows glistened. It was her wedding dress.

"I must haste—haste," she whispered, and pinned it round her. "My pearls, where are my pearls?" A row of milk-white pearls were clasped round her aged neck.

Fairy-like slippers, and stockings of spun gossamer came next, and then—Gibbie's tap at the door.

"Ready, ready," responded a low cry from within. "Coming, coming. . . . In garments whiter than snow.

. . . In my wedding garment, dear Lord, my own wedding garment——" the door opened, and Gibbie caught the speaker in her arms.

. . . . . .

"It was such a silly thing to do." Lady Margaret, penitent and apologetic, nestled down in her bed, and sipped the cordial tendered by her careful attendant. "You did not half scold me, Gibbie, dear. I don't know what possessed me to jumble up things so. Hearing about Miss Jenny's wedding perhaps. Do you know I kept thinking——"

"Na, dinna think," said Gibbie, soothingly. At the same moment a drop of water splashed onto Lady Margaret's hand.

"Why, Gibbie? Gibbie, what's that?"

"A—a kind o' a cauld i' my heid, my leddy. Yer leddyship's pardon for siccan a rudeness," and the tear was hastily obliterated; but with the same motion an uncontrollable impulse overcame the poor, fond, faithful creature; her swelling heart, nigh to bursting, prompted a lower bending of the head, and she kissed the brow that lay upon the pillow.

For a single moment Lady Margaret, her brain clear, her senses as acute as ever, felt confounded by the action; almost as deeply disconcerted as though she had been struck a blow; but the next, a smile of heavenly beauty transfigured her worn features, and she did that which Gibbie never will forget to the end of her life, she drew down the large, brown, homely cheek a second time, and with her own lips returned the kiss.

"Ye'll be better the morn." A struggling whisper, Gibbie all but sobbing.

"Better? Oh, much better. . . . To-morrow? I shall be well to-morrow. . . . I shall be satisfied, for —I shall awake—in Thy likeness."

But the moment of that awakening was scarce known even to the watcher; it had come and passed ere the grey dawn broke.

. . . . . .

The bride and bridegroom were departing. Wedding guests clustered within the portico of Lochmadden House; faces crowded the windows: baskets of rose-leaves were waiting to be showered forth, and

from lip to lip passed the query, "Why do they not come?"

It turned out, however, that there was only one delinquent. Eustace Dagnam, booted and spurred, blither and handsomer than ever, was ready; had been ready some time, and his friends were now rallying him on the tardiness of his bride.

And when she came at length, Jenny had no words for anybody. She had found her father, withdrawn from every eye, seeking a momentary solitude wherein to—then she knew what had happened.

He had kept his secret up to that moment; the day must not be dimmed. *She* would not have had a shadow cast upon it.

Indeed it was by sheer accident that tidings of his loss had reached Colonel Kelso in the midst of the festival, for Gibbie had sternly refused to despatch any. Her white face had flushed into wrath at the suggestion, and she had turned upon the speaker fiercely.

"Wad *she* ha'e sent? Ye'll *no* send." And all

day long her heavy foot went up and down within the veiled house, the while her lips were glued together.

"She canna rest," whispered the maids. "She's clean broken-hearted," they told Donald.

And they saw that their sympathy, well meant, went for nothing; and openly thanked the Lord when at last in the golden sunset another figure stood in the doorway.

No sooner did the old woman feel the touch of her "cornell's" hand than tears streamed forth. She was gentle as a lamb from that time thenceforth.

All the countryside followed the mourning procession when "Leddy Marget" was taken from their midst. Her remains were conveyed to the South, to be laid beside those of her beloved husband and children, but her memory still lingers among the simple folks who knew her in her later days, and many humble voices will still be raised in blessing as they tell the tale of her life among them.

And Gibbie, a stout little old woman with a peaceful countenance, has a pretty cottage of her

own on the Lochmadden estate, with Mysie to share it; and many days seldom go by without a visit from some of the family. Mrs. Dagnam sends Katie down if she cannot come herself; and of course the baby is a constant dropper in; but no visitor is so prized as "himsel'," the courteous, cordial, cheery colonel, who sits and talks, often falling into a muse ere he rises to depart, and whose voice always softens, while his cap goes off, whenever he mentions the name of "Leddy Marget."

THE END.

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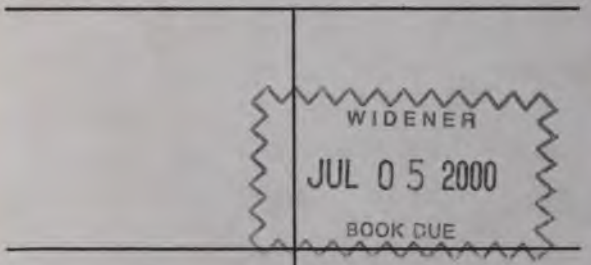

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